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[Defense Morning Clips 29 July 2021.pdf](#)

This Day in Navy and Marine Corps History:

1920 - USS St. Louis (CA 20) is ordered to Turkish waters to protect American nationals and citizens during the Greco-Turkish War (1919-1922).

Executive Summary:

- Trade and regional press reported on CNO Adm. Mike Gilday's participation in the International Maritime Security Conference in Singapore.
- National, local and trade press reported on the Navy's announcement that two Sailors died due to complications associated with COVID-19.

CNO:

1. CNO Delivers Opening Remarks during the International Maritime Security Conference Chief of Navy Panel

(NAVY.MIL 28 JUL 21) ... CNO Adm. Mike Gilday

Good afternoon ... thanks Dr. Till for that kind introduction and thank you for your many years advancing the art and science of maritime strategy.

2. CNO Gilday: Keeping Littoral Combat Ships Nimble Key to Pacific Deployments, No Plans for 1st Fleet in Singapore

(USNI NEWS 28 JUL 21) ... Dzirhan Mahadzir

KUALA LUMPUR — The Navy is making Littoral Combat Ship deployments in the Indo-Pacific region more flexible and unpredictable, allowing the service to respond to impromptu engagement opportunities and ensuring the LCS are not tied to any fixed location for too long, Chief of Naval Operations Adm. Mike Gilday said during a media conference call on Wednesday in conjunction with his official visit to Singapore.

3. CNO Visits Singapore, Speaks at IMSC and Highlights Cooperation

Chief of Naval Operations (CNO) Adm. Mike Gilday travelled to Singapore July 27-28, to meet with the country's senior defense leaders and take part in the International Maritime Security Conference (IMSC).

(NAVY.MIL 28 JUL 21)

SINGAPORE - Chief of Naval Operations (CNO) Adm. Mike Gilday travelled to Singapore July 27-28, to meet

with the country's senior defense leaders and take part in the International Maritime Security Conference (IMSC).

4. U.S. Has 'No Plans Right Now' To Increase LCS Presence In Singapore, Says Navy Chief

(DEFENSE NEWS 28 JUL 21) ... Mike Yeo

MELBOURNE, Australia — The U.S. Navy no longer has concrete plans to increase the number of littoral combat ships deploying to the Indo-Pacific region on a rotational basis, the chief of naval operations has confirmed.

5. South China Sea: U.S. Will Ensure 'All Nations Can Benefit' From Resource-Rich International Waters, Top Navy Admiral Says

(SOUTH CHINA MORNING POST 28 JUL 21) ... Dewey Sim

International law and legal customs that govern the high seas have the full support of the United States, which will work with partners in Asia to ensure that all nations can "equitably" benefit from marine resources, the US navy's top admiral said on Wednesday.

6. Cost Of Being Unprepared For Next Pandemic Will Be Too Great: Ng Eng Hen

(STRAITS TIMES 28 JUL 21) ... Lim Min Zhang

SINGAPORE - Plans must be in place for more coordinated efforts to deal with the next pandemic and other common challenges as the cost of getting caught unprepared again will be too great, said Defence Minister Ng Eng Hen on Wednesday (July 28).

SECDEF:

7. Pentagon Chief Seeks To Nudge Ties With Vietnam As Human Rights Concerns Linger

(REUTERS 28 JUL 21) ... Idrees Ali

HANOI - U.S. Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin sought on Thursday to nudge forward security ties with Vietnam that have been slowly deepening as both countries watch China's activities in the South China Sea with growing alarm.

8. As Tensions With China Mount, U.S. Defense Secretary Visits Vietnam, Vows Support For Region

(ASSOCIATED PRESS 28 JUL 21)

HANOI, Vietnam — U.S. Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin is seeking to bolster ties with Vietnam, one of the Southeast Asian nations embroiled in a territorial rift with China, during a two-day visit starting Wednesday.

9. U.S. Defence Secretary Lloyd Austin's Vietnam Visit To Focus On Maritime Cooperation, Distrust Over Wartime History

(SOUTH CHINA MORNING POST 28 JUL 21) ... Bac Pham

US Defence Secretary Lloyd Austin arrived in Vietnam on Wednesday for talks that are expected to focus heavily on security and military cooperation between the erstwhile enemies, along with Washington's plan to help Southeast Asia tackle Covid-19 and its post-pandemic recovery.

10. 'We're Better Than That': Austin Speaks About 'Un-American' Discrimination Against Asians

(STARS AND STRIPES 28 JUL 21) ... David Choi

Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin, speaking in Singapore on Tuesday, recognized discrimination against Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders in the United States, but said that while the U.S. "doesn't always get it right," admitting its flaws is a unique characteristic of democracy.

STRATEGIC COMPETITION:

11. Destroyer Makes 7th U.S. Navy Taiwan Strait Transit in 2021

(USNI NEWS 28 JUL 21) ... Mallory Shelbourne

A U.S. guided-missile destroyer moved through the Taiwan Strait on Wednesday, marking the seventh transit of the waters this year by an American warship.

12. Chinese Military Drills Simulate Amphibious Landing And Island Seizure In Battle Conditions

(SOUTH CHINA MORNING POST 28 JUL 21) ... Kristin Huang

The Chinese military has conducted yet another drill featuring assault landing and island-control exercises, Chinese state media reported on Tuesday, continuing its training to boost soldiers' combat readiness in case of insurgency in the Taiwan Strait.

13. China's Ambassador To U.S. Is 'Willing To Ruffle Feathers'

Qin Gang rose from working for a foreign news agency to becoming a trusted aide to Xi Jinping, China's top leader.

(NEW YORK TIMES 29 JUL 21) ... Chris Buckley

China's new ambassador to the United States arrived in Washington on Wednesday — Qin Gang, a diplomat whose record of vigorously contesting Western criticism suggests that Beijing is steeling for extended tensions with Washington.

14. Beijing Plans New Sanction Laws for Hong Kong, Macau

Rules threaten to punish companies that comply with U.S. and European bans

(WALL STREET JOURNAL 29 JUL 21) ... Elaine Yu

China's government is planning to introduce new laws in Hong Kong and Macau that could bar foreign entities and individuals in the cities from complying with sanctions against China, according to people familiar with the discussions.

15. U.S. And Russia Hold 'Substantive' Strategic Stability Talks As Moscow Raps Biden For Comments

(CNN 28 JUL 21) ... Nicole Gaouette and Kylie Atwood

US and Russian officials had "professional and substantive talks" on strategic stability in Switzerland, the State Department said in a statement Wednesday.

16. U.S., Russia Hold Nuclear Talks In Geneva After Summit Push

(REUTERS 28 JUL 21) ... Stephanie Nebehay and Jonathan Landay

GENEVA/WASHINGTON - Senior U.S. and Russian officials on Wednesday restarted talks on easing tensions between the world's largest nuclear weapons powers and agreed to reconvene in September after informal consultations, the State Department said.

17. China Offers The Taliban A Warm Welcome While Urging Peace Talks

Worried about the war in Afghanistan, China has stepped up diplomatic efforts with the government and the group to encourage a political settlement after the U.S. withdrawal.

(NEW YORK TIMES 29 JUL 21) ... Steven Lee Myers

China offered a high-profile public stage to the Taliban on Wednesday, declaring that the group rapidly retaking large parts of Afghanistan would play "an important role in the process of peaceful reconciliation and reconstruction" of the country.

18. China Cracks Down On Foreign Media Over Flood Coverage

Western journalists reporting on a natural disaster met with public hostility in person and online that the Chinese state media openly encouraged.

(NEW YORK TIMES 29 JUL 21) ... Li Yuan

After extreme flooding in central China last week destroyed homes, engulfed subways and killed at least 73, the ruling Communist Party found a convenient outlet for the public's pent-up emotions: the foreign news media.

MARINE CORPS:

19. See F-35B Jets Take Off At Sea For Australian Exercise Talisman Sabre

(DEFENSE NEWS 28 JUL 21) ... Mike Yeo

MELBOURNE, Australia — U.S. Marine Corps F-35B jets are carrying out high-end integrated air warfare training with Australian counterparts in the skies above the country and the Coral Sea, as both nations hold a massive multidomain exercise.

20. Marines Finally Getting A Realistic Force-On-Force Shooter For Combat Training

(MARINE CORPS TIMES 28 JUL 21) ... Todd South

Within two years, Marines could finally see realistic shooting and effects when they go head to head with other services, allies or Marines in force-on-force training.

SECURITY ENVIRONMENT:

21. Iran's Top Leader Dims Hopes For Resuming Talks On Nuclear Accord

"Trust in the West does not work," Ayatollah Ali Khamenei said, signaling further problems with stalled negotiations to salvage the country's nuclear agreement.

(NEW YORK TIMES 29 JUL 21) ... Rick Gladstone

Iran's top leader injected new doubts Wednesday into the stalled effort to save the country's 2015 nuclear pact with major powers, accusing the United States of duplicity and chastising the outgoing Iranian president as naïve.

22. U.S. Sanctions Syrians Linked to Alleged Atrocities

Action is a public censure of the Assad regime and its supporters including Russia and Iran, analysts say, given the targeted officials' limited exposure

(WALL STREET JOURNAL 28 JUL 21) ... Ian Talley

WASHINGTON—The U.S. Treasury Department levied sanctions against five senior Syrian security officials and eight prisons accused of committing human-rights abuses, the start of what the Biden administration says will be its campaign to hold the Assad regime accountable for war crimes.

CORONAVIRUS:

23. Two Sailors Die from COVID-19 Complications After Hospitalization

(USNI NEWS 28 JUL 21) ... Sam LaGrone

An active-duty Navy doctor in North Carolina and a reserve sailor in Idaho died this week from complications from COVID-19, the Navy announced on Wednesday.

24. DoD Making Masks Mandatory Again, Even for the Vaccinated, in Some Places

(MILITARY.COM 28 JUL 21) ... Stephen Losey

The Defense Department on Wednesday resumed requiring all people – including those who have been fully vaccinated against COVID-19 – to wear masks indoors at military facilities in places where the disease is spreading quickly.

25. Biden to Require Covid Vaccine or Regular Testing for Federal Employees

The announcement, expected on Thursday, is also set to include social distancing, masking and restrictions on travel for the unvaccinated

(NEW YORK TIMES 29 JUL 21) ... Michael D. Shear

WASHINGTON -- President Biden will formally announce on Thursday that all civilian federal employees must be vaccinated against the coronavirus or be forced to submit to regular testing, social distancing, mask requirements and restrictions on most travel, two people familiar with the president's plans said on Wednesday.

DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE:

26. Austin Calls For 'Responsible' Space Operations

(WASHINGTON TIMES 28 JUL 21) ... Bill Gertz

Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin earlier this month outlined key elements of "responsible behavior in space" in a memorandum to senior Pentagon and military leaders.

27. DoD Dragged Its Feet On Toxic Chemical Exposure Prevention And Clean-Up, IG Finds

(MILITARY TIMES 27 JUL 21) ... Meghann Myers

Back in 2011, the Defense Department's Emerging Chemical Program issued a "risk alert" detailing the hazards of per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances, known collectively as PFAS, found in aqueous film-forming foam used to fight vehicle and aircraft fires. Then nothing happened.

28. New Data Analysis Software Could Give Commanders More Time To Make Combat Decisions, NORTHCOM Commander Says

(STARS AND STRIPES 28 JUL 21) ... Caitlin Doornbos

The military is finding new ways to use technology to help commanders make better, faster decisions on the battlefield with software that brings together and analyzes information such as radar data from across the world, Air Force Gen. Glen VanHerck, the commander of U.S. Northern Command, said Wednesday.

EXECUTIVE/LEGISLATIVE:

29. HASC Readiness Mark Wants to Save INSURV Reports; TACAIR Panel Cautious of Navy's Strike Fighter Plans

(USNI NEWS 28 JUL 21) ... Mallory Shelbourne

The House Armed Services Committee readiness subcommittee wants to make sure the independent report on the health of the Navy's fleet continues in perpetuity.

30. Sea Power Panel Backs Block Buy Of Amphibious Ships

(DEFENSE NEWS 28 JUL 21) ... Joe Gould

WASHINGTON - A House panel on Wednesday advanced a proposal to authorize the Navy to make a block buy of amphibious ships for one more year, meant to save taxpayer dollars, proponents say.

31. HASC 'Skeptical' Of Navy Plans To Mitigate Fighter Shortfall, Transition Into Future Jet

(DEFENSE NEWS 28 JUL 21) ... Megan Eckstein

WASHINGTON — The House Armed Services Committee has reservations about the Navy's plans to transition from the F/A-18E/F Super Hornet into the Next Generation Air Dominance, or NGAD, future fighter jet, though it's unclear if the committee will take action to force a change in plans.

32. Plans For Military Pay Raise, Extra Allowance For Low-Income Troops Move Ahead

(MILITARY TIMES 28 JUL 21) ... Leo Shane III

A key House panel backed both a 2.7 percent pay raise for troops next year and the creation of a new basic needs allowance for low-income service members, signaling significant financial help in 2022 for some service members facing financial woes.

33. House Panel Wants Probe Of F-35 Breathing Issues

(THE HILL 28 JUL 21) ... Rebecca Kheel

A House Armed Services Committee subpanel wants the Pentagon to examine breathing issues faced by F-35 fighter jet pilots.

ALLIES & PARTNERS:

34. U.S. Bolsters Ties To India Amid Challenges In Asia

India will receive \$25 million in coronavirus assistance as the two countries pledge cooperation in Asia

(WASHINGTON POST 28 JUL 21) ... Gerry Shih

NEW DELHI — The United States will give India \$25 million to vaccinate against the coronavirus, Secretary of State Antony Blinken announced Wednesday as part of the Biden administration's effort to strengthen ties with a diplomatic partner wedged between two of the United States' largest geopolitical challenges, Afghanistan and China.

CAPABILITIES (ACQUISITION AND INNOVATION):

35. Japanese Firms Sign \$225 Million Deals To Maintain Ospreys For Navy, Marine Corps

(STARS AND STRIPES 28 JUL 21) ... Alex Wilson

The U.S. military has signed two Japanese firms to maintain its V-22 Osprey tiltrotor aircraft across the Pacific under contracts worth \$225 million each.

COMMENTARY:

36. We're Closing In At Last On Fixing How Military Handles Sexual Assault

(USA TODAY 28 JUL 21) ... Sen. Kirsten Gillibrand (D-NY) and Rep. Jackie Speier (D-CA)

When someone enlists in the military, they understand that serving their country means putting their life on the line. As one soldier once shared with us, she was prepared and trained to fight the enemy outside the wire but never thought the enemy would be a fellow soldier. Unfortunately, that's all too often the case – as it was for Army Specialist Vanessa Guillen, who was sexually harassed by a supervisor before being brutally murdered by a fellow soldier on base at Fort Hood.

37. What if There Wasn't a Coup Plot, General Milley?

(NEW YORK TIMES 28 JUL 21) ... Christopher Caldwell

This month, the first crop of books about the end of Donald Trump's administration has prompted speculation: Was the president plotting to remain in power through some kind of coup?

38. Fully Fund The Guam Defense System

(WAR ON THE ROCKS 29 JUL 21) ... Bradley Bowman and Mark Montgomery

The Biden administration talks tough when it comes to competing with China and taking the necessary steps to reinforce America's defense posture in the Indo-Pacific.

CNO:

1. CNO Delivers Opening Remarks during the International Maritime Security Conference Chief of Navy Panel

(NAVY.MIL 28 JUL 21) ... CNO Adm. Mike Gilday

Good afternoon ... thanks Dr. Till for that kind introduction and thank you for your many years advancing the art and science of maritime strategy.

It is truly an honor to participate in this year's International Maritime Security Conference and I would like to begin by expressing my deep gratitude to the government of Singapore the Singaporean Navy as well as the many invisible hands that helped facilitate this event. Without your efforts we could not have participated in such rich and productive dialogues here thank you all.

These are unprecedented times and you overcame substantial challenges to make this week happen.

Rear Admiral Beng congratulations to you and your team on bringing us together in this incredible city. With so many countries bordering all of the world's oceans represented in this audience and virtually I must compliment you for hosting what is truly a global event. Thank you for your leadership, for your hospitality, it has come through in every aspect of this great forum.

The United States and Singapore are more than just military partners, we're close friends, strategic partners, and we collaborate closely every single day. Our relationship is deep and enduring, and I look forward to continue to strengthen the bonds among our two countries and our two navies.

We gather this week along the world's busiest maritime corridor a waterway that advances the progress, strengthens cooperation, and fosters the resilience of mankind.

And we come together now in need of all three- progress, cooperation and resilience - for it is the only way we will navigate the challenges and harness the opportunities in our time.

For thousands of years we have used the world's oceans to expand the reach of human civilization, harness natural resources, and establish trade routes for the flow of wealth, culture, and ideas across the globe.

And in the wake of the Second World War a free and open system emerged that has generated shared security and prosperity throughout the world.

This order has brought about 76 years of great power peace and served as a rising tide lifting billions across the world to a better life.

Indeed, this free and open order floats on seawater, and seawater more than anything else has been the medium for our prosperity powering more than 90 percent of all trade and 95 percent of digital information.

The scale and the scope of our dependence on the seas continues to grow. From the movement of raw and refined products around the world to mining and fishing, to energy generation and our expanding digital infrastructure, the seas are lifting every nation to new heights.

Those of us in naval uniforms see it with our own eyes every day. Over the past 25 years global waterways have become more congested with maritime traffic increasing by a magnitude of four.

On the seabed, transoceanic cables carry nearly all of our digital information and new tools and techniques are making undersea resources even more accessible.

Advancements in Artificial Intelligence, Machine Learning, 5G networks, and many other technologies are reshaping our communities, our economies, and our future.

Indeed, we have reached a point of unprecedented progress, unbounded perception, and unlimited potential.

But at the same time we remain exposed to a host of challenges- including the COVID-19 pandemic, sea level rise, terrorism, violent extremism, the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction.

Additionally, excessive maritime claims are subverting recognized boundaries, violations of Exclusive Economic Zones are robbing nations of their resources illegally, unreported and unregulated fishing is depleting the world's oceans of protein, and malign activities at sea are escalating tensions abroad.

Make no mistake, the choices we make today will have a dramatic impact on our collective future. This decade is critical. As I look back at our wake and reflect on the direction of maritime security in the new normal I am convinced that now, more than ever, cooperation...cooperation... is the key aspect to our modern understanding and application of sea power.

Cooperation allows us to prosper from the sea and welcomes every nation to take advantage of what the seas have to offer them not just a select few. It ensures that our most vital economic and social resource - seawater - is shared sustainably and shared responsibly.

Cooperation recognizes the interconnectedness we all share. What transpires here near the Strait of Malacca and along all the coastlines, tributaries, and sea lanes of the world affects the health, security, and prosperity of everyone.

And, most importantly, cooperation when applied with naval power promotes freedom and peace, and prevents coercion, intimidation, and aggression. After all, cooperation breeds trust, and that trust is something you cannot surge.

Safe and secure seas begin with a safe and secure international order and naval cooperation here in the Asia Pacific and across the globe set the conditions for this order to thrive.

Over the last eight decades, Sailors from around the world have shouldered the responsibility of maintaining the rules based order and patrolled the lonely frontiers far from home to uphold the conditions that sustain it.

Many of us gathered here today have shared in this sacrifice. And we - like those who came before us - understand that a strong coalition of maritime nations is needed not only to protect our homelands but also to support a common set of rules to govern life at sea.

This is why the United States Navy is operating in lock-step with so many of you - I would indeed say all of you - from the Black Sea to the Arabian Gulf, from the Arctic to the Indo-Pacific. We are steaming and flying together to keep the peace, safeguard opportunity, and preserve the freedom of the seas.

We see this in practice across the world's oceans every day:

- With multilateral discussions, combined training and education opportunities, and a host of senior leader conferences, like this one.
- With a host of multi-lateral exercises such PACIFIC VANGUARD TALISMAN SABRE RIMPAC and KOMODO.
- With Task Force Sentinel working to secure the passage of commerce in and around Southwest Asia.
- With the Enforcement Coordination Cell supporting the United Nations' pursuit of a denuclearized Korean Peninsula through sanctions enforcement.
- -And with bold steps towards ever greater interoperability and interchangeability across the globe underscored I think by the recent integration of international naval forces with FS CHARLES DE GAULLE and HMS QUEEN ELIZABETH.

All of these strengthen our ability to respond to any challenge and highlight the importance of our Navy-to-Navy partnerships. Because at the end of the day we ALL have a role to play.

For our part, the United States Navy stands ready to deliver naval power any place, any day, and any time.

We reject behavior that undermines the legitimacy of the free and open order. This is contrary to what we stand for - the rule of law, freedom of navigation, and freedom of the seas.

Earlier this year our nation's Sea Services released a new Tri-Service maritime strategy called Advantage at Sea. In it we prioritize our most pressing concerns, recognize the ways that new and converging technologies are shaping the security environment, and emphasize the need for cooperation with an ever-expanding orbit of allies and partners.

We remain laser-focused on operating, sustaining, and maintaining a ready Navy to demonstrate our global reach enforce common principles and sustain the conditions that enable shared prosperity.

Readiness translates into deterrence, into economic security, and signals the strength of our resolve.

Meanwhile we are evolving our fleet commanders' ability to employ large, distributed force elements.

Later this summer, we'll conduct the biggest U.S. Navy exercise in a generation with Large Scale Exercise 2021.

Spanning 17 time zones, approximately 25,000 Sailors and Marines on both sides of the Pacific and Atlantic Oceans will leverage the integrated power of our sensors, weapons, and platforms across all domains.

We are also moving to adopt innovative capabilities much more deeply into our fleet. Through autonomy, robust networking, artificial intelligence, directed energy, and weapons of increasing range and speed we are sighted on delivering a lethal, survivable, hybrid fleet of manned and unmanned platforms. This hybrid fleet will operate from the seabed to space and from the littorals to the open ocean.

We will combine our Sailors' exceptional capabilities with our allies and partners to generate unprecedented an naval force that will deter conflict, bolster diplomacy, preserve security and, if called upon, be ready to respond to crisis or quickly end hostilities.

We are aiming high, along with all of you, our strategic direction is strong and I believe we are accelerating the development of a modernized, integrated all-domain naval force for the future.

I'll close with this: The challenges ahead may loom large but I am confident in our collective ability to face them together, and because of that, I am filled with optimism, with strength, and conviction.

Through continued engagement and integration we will ensure free and open access in every waterway and the many benefits that flow along with it.

Our relationships are unwavering and the United States Navy is committed to maintaining a steady course of naval cooperation and growing the connections among our nations. Without a doubt our greatest strength lies in unity.

I would again like to express my appreciation to the people and the government of Singapore for welcoming us in your nation this week and to your local community for hosting American ships and Sailors over the years.

Thank you, and I look forward to this afternoon's discussion.

<https://www.navy.mil/Press-Office/Speeches/display-speeches/Article/2709840/cno-delivers-opening-remarks-during-the-international-maritime-security-confere/>

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2. CNO Gilday: Keeping Littoral Combat Ships Nimble Key to Pacific Deployments, No Plans for 1st Fleet in Singapore

(USNI NEWS 28 JUL 21) ... Dzirhan Mahadzir

KUALA LUMPUR — The Navy is making Littoral Combat Ship deployments in the Indo-Pacific region more flexible and unpredictable, allowing the service to respond to impromptu engagement opportunities and ensuring the LCS are not tied to any fixed location for too long, Chief of Naval Operations Adm. Mike Gilday said during a media conference call on Wednesday in conjunction with his official visit to Singapore.

USS Charleston (LCS-18) has used Singapore as a replenishment port while USS Tulsa (LCS-16) has largely operated out of Guam – a break from the Navy’s initial plan for the platform that had Singapore Changi Naval Base as the only service’s LCS hub in the Pacific.

“We’re just flexing towards different exercises and movements and trying to be operationally unpredictable. We’re being very aggressive in terms of moving LCS in different regions out here, trying to do it very quickly, putting ourselves in a position where we don’t have to keep them in any given location for very long, that we can move them around to any exercises at a short fuse or PASSEX exercises with other navies,” he said.

The Navy has been focused on resolving the problems of the LCS and is headed in the right direction in regard to the operational availability of the LCS fleet, with deployments to the Caribbean and to the Western Pacific, Gilday said. The plan to deploy up to four LCS from Singapore currently meets the Navy’s operational commitment, but in the future, I would like to see more LCS operating in the Western Pacific but we have not settled on what the basing model might be for those ships.” He added that the rotational deployment in the Singapore model and the home basing model in Japan have both worked well for the Navy.

Gilday dismissed the idea of the establishment of a U.S. Navy 1st Fleet command based in Singapore. “Right now the United States Navy has no plans to stand up another fleet headquarters, whether it is in Singapore or in any place else in the Western Pacific,” he said.

Instead, the Navy is exercising the inherent mobility of its existing fleet headquarters to deploy wherever a fleet headquarters is required. “Sometimes people tend to think of those fleet headquarters as geographically constrained, that they can only operate in those specific areas of operations but that’s now how we look at it,” Gilday said.

The service wants to be more innovative, not self-limit via geography and use its fleet headquarters in a much more mobile way.

“There are other options besides standing up an additional fleet headquarters to meet any kind of operational demand we may have, whether it is in the Indian Ocean or Western Pacific or other regions,” he said. Gilday cited the example of U.S. 2nd Fleet command team, based in Norfolk, Va., that has deployed to North Carolina, Iceland, aboard a command ship in the Mediterranean, Norway and Denmark.

Speaking on the inclusion of the destroyer USS The Sullivans (DDG-68) in the U.K. Royal Navy’s Queen Elizabeth Carrier Strike Group and the embark of U.S. Marine Corps Fighter Attack Squadron (VMFA) 211 on the carrier, Gilday said the Navy was happy to be part of the strike group and it had been successful in terms of interoperability and interchangeability. He said the Marine F-35 deployment will provide experience and flexibility for future deployments of U.S. F-35s on HMS Queen Elizabeth (R08).

Earlier on Wednesday, Gilday participated in the International Maritime Security Conference, delivering a presentation there that reiterated the U.S. Navy’s commitment to ensuring security and stability globally with its partners. At the same time, Gilday also gave a brief preview on the upcoming Large Scale Exercise 21, saying, “Later this summer ... we’ll conduct the biggest U.S. Navy exercise in a generation with Large Scale Exercise 2021.

Spanning 17 time zones ... approximately 25,000 Sailors and Marines on both sides of the Pacific and Atlantic Oceans will leverage the integrated power of our sensors, weapons, and platforms across all domains.”

During the conference, the Chief of the German Navy, Vice Adm. Kay-Achim Shönbach, said frigate FGS Bayern (F217) will be dispatched in August and reach the Indo-Pacific in the beginning of September. The ship will return to Germany by March 2022. He also said that in the future, there is the possibility of using crew changes to sustain vessels in the Indo-Pacific region for up to two years and that Germany might set up a permanent logistics hub in Singapore or Australia.

<https://news.usni.org/2021/07/28/cno-gilday-keeping-littoral-combat-ships-nimble-key-to-pacific-deployments-no-plans-for-1st-fleet-in-singapore>

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3. CNO Visits Singapore, Speaks at IMSC and Highlights Cooperation

Chief of Naval Operations (CNO) Adm. Mike Gilday travelled to Singapore July 27-28, to meet with the country’s senior defense leaders and take part in the International Maritime Security Conference (IMSC).

(NAVY.MIL 28 JUL 21)

SINGAPORE - Chief of Naval Operations (CNO) Adm. Mike Gilday travelled to Singapore July 27-28, to meet with the country’s senior defense leaders and take part in the International Maritime Security Conference (IMSC).

During the visit, Gilday met with Defense Minister Dr. Ng Eng Hen, Chief of Defense Force Lt. Gen. Melvyn Ong, and Chief of Navy Rear Adm. Aaron Beng.

“The United States and Singapore are more than just military partners,” Gilday said. “Our relationship is deep and enduring. We’re close friends, strategic partners, and we collaborate closely every single day.”

While in Singapore, Gilday also took part in IMSC and offered remarks at a Chiefs of Navy panel, which also included Adm. Yamamura Hiroshi, Chief of Staff, Japan Maritime Self-Defence; Adm. Pierre Vandier, Chief of Staff, French Navy; and Adm. Tan Sri Mohammed Reza, Chief of Navy, Royal Malaysian Navy.

“I am convinced that now, more than ever, cooperation is the key aspect to our modern understanding and application of sea power,” Gilday said during his panel remarks. “Cooperation allows us to prosper from the sea and welcomes every nation to take advantage of what the seas have to offer them - not just a select few. Cooperation recognizes the interconnectedness we all share. Most importantly, cooperation, when applied with naval power, promotes freedom and peace and prevents coercion, intimidation, and aggression. After all, cooperation breeds trust, and that is something that you cannot surge.”

Gilday also said the choices we make today will have a dramatic impact on our collective future.

“The challenges ahead may loom large, but I am confident in our collective ability to face them together and because of that, I am filled with optimism, with strength, and conviction.” he said. “Our relationships are unwavering and the United States Navy is committed to maintaining a steady course of naval cooperation and growing the connections among our nations. Without a doubt our greatest strength lies in unity.”

This visit marked Gilday’s first to Singapore since assuming duties as CNO.

Quick Facts

For more information about the U.S. Navy Chief of Naval Operations, please contact the Public Affairs Office or visit: www.navy.mil/cno <<http://www.navy.mil/cno>> .

<https://www.navy.mil/Press-Office/Press-Releases/display-pressreleases/Article/2709854/cno-visits-singapore-speaks-at-imscc-and-highlights-cooperation/>

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4. U.S. Has 'No Plans Right Now' To Increase LCS Presence In Singapore, Says Navy Chief

(DEFENSE NEWS 28 JUL 21) ... Mike Yeo

MELBOURNE, Australia — The U.S. Navy no longer has concrete plans to increase the number of littoral combat ships deploying to the Indo-Pacific region on a rotational basis, the chief of naval operations has confirmed.

Speaking to reporters at a virtual media roundtable while visiting Singapore, CNO Adm. Mike Gilday said that “there are no plans right now to actually increase the numbers that rotate in and out of Singapore,” adding that he thinks the current operating model meets the Navy’s operational commitments.

However, he noted, “I would like to see more LCS deploy to the Western Pacific in the future, although we have not yet settled on what the basing model of those ships might be.”

Previous plans called for four LCS to be rotationally deployed to the region by 2016. This target was subsequently moved back to 2018 in light of troubles with the LCS program and a subsequent revamp of the operating and crewing model for the ships.

Singapore agreed to host these LCS rotational deployments, with its naval base at Changi acting as the maintenance and logistics hub.

Despite this, Gilday was upbeat about the ongoing LCS deployments to the region. The Navy recently deployed two Independence-class LCS to the Indo-Pacific, with the Charleston and the Tulsa arriving in Singapore and Okinawa, respectively, in mid-June.

The CNO also touted a new operationally unpredictable model for the LCS deployed to the region, with the Navy now looking to quickly move the ships around the Western Pacific instead of staying at a given location for too long.

He also said efforts to improve the program are going well and increasing the operational availability of the LCS. The LCS program has been bedeviled by costs, engineering and development issues.

Gilday was in Singapore to speak at a maritime security conference and meet with the island nation’s defense minister, chief of the defense forces and Navy chief. The leaders discussed potential opportunities for force posture training involving their navies, calling the U.S. naval presence in Singapore the “bedrock for security in southeast Asia.”

During his speech at the International Maritime Security Conference, Gilday reinforced the message of partnership touted by U.S. Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin in Singapore the previous day.

“Cooperation allows us to prosper from the sea and welcomes every nation to take advantage of what the seas have to offer them — not just a select few. Cooperation recognizes the interconnectedness we all share. Most importantly, cooperation, when applied with naval power, promotes freedom and peace and prevents coercion, intimidation and aggression,” the CNO told attendees at a naval chiefs panel that also includes those of Japan, France and Malaysia.

<https://www.defensenews.com/naval/2021/07/28/us-has-no-plans-right-now-to-increase-lcs-presence-in-singapore-says-navy-chief/>

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5. South China Sea: U.S. Will Ensure ‘All Nations Can Benefit’ From Resource-Rich International Waters, Top Navy Admiral Says

(SOUTH CHINA MORNING POST 28 JUL 21) ... Dewey Sim

International law and legal customs that govern the high seas have the full support of the United States, which will work with partners in Asia to ensure that all nations can “equitably” benefit from marine resources, the US navy’s top admiral said on Wednesday.

The comments in Singapore by Admiral Michael Gilday, Chief of Naval Operations, came a day after US Secretary of Defence Lloyd Austin underscored Washington’s long-standing position that China’s vast claims of the South China Sea had no basis in international law.

Gilday, speaking during a media round table, said the US Navy operated under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (Unclos), adding that the law was “enforceable”, “unambiguous” and had lifted societies out of poverty.

The US, unlike China, is not among the 168 nations that have ratified the 1982 law, but abides by it and views it as the customary law of the high seas.

Among other things, Unclos standardised how countries demarcate their territorial seas, up to 12 nautical miles from their coasts, and more expansive exclusive economic zones (EEZs) that extend up to 200 nautical miles. States have sole rights to drill, fish and mine in their respective EEZs.

Southeast Asian states that dispute China’s sweeping “nine-dash line” claim over the South China Sea say it is in clear contravention of Unclos; Beijing has countered by saying it has “historic rights” over the waters.

“[Unclos] essentially allows the equitable use of international waters, including the seabed and resources in the ocean, so that everybody can benefit from them,” Gilday said, when asked if the US navy supported regional states’ legal rights in their EEZs.

“The aim of the US Navy out here in the Western Pacific is to work alongside ... our allies and partners to enforce those international laws and to make sure that all nations can benefit; that all economies and all people that want to use them have unfettered, open access to the seas and the airways above them.”

In the 30-minute session, Gilday also referenced Unclos when asked whether the US Navy had specific plans to do with China’s hardening policy towards self-ruled Taiwan, which it views as a renegade province.

“We continue to operate in the Western Pacific on a day-to-day basis ... our ships are stationed out here in the Pacific and so on any given day, we’ve got about a third of the navy out at sea, and so we try to maintain a sizeable presence in the South China Sea and in areas of the Western Pacific,” Gilday said.

“In fact, part of the reason [we are] here today ... [is] to really underscore the importance of reinforcing a rules-based international framework that is grounded on the UN Law of the Sea.”

Asked about the rising tensions in the South China Sea and the possibility of a military build-up in the disputed waterway, Gilday said he did not see the situation as “close to a boiling point”.

“We are trying not to be provocative but then again, we want to uphold international law,” he added.

Gilday also addressed the rotational deployment of the US Navy’s once beleaguered class of littoral combat ships (LCS) to Singapore.

The vessels have a shallow draft and are envisaged as being ideal for Asia’s busy and disputed waters but for some years were plagued by multiple problems including bloated cost, design and questions about the warships’ ability to survive in combat.

Four LCSs are currently designated for rotational deployment out of Singapore.

Gilday said there were no plans to increase this number and lauded the current operations as “a solid operating model”.

“In the future, I would like to see more LCSs operating in the Western Pacific but we have not yet settled on what the basic model might be for those ships,” he added.

Gilday, who was sworn in as the US Navy’s top officer in 2019, was in Singapore for an introductory visit and to attend the International Maritime Security Conference.

The admiral’s Singapore visit coincided with Defence Secretary Austin’s pit stop in the city state from Monday to Wednesday, as part of his three-nation Southeast Asian tour.

In a lecture organised by the International Institute of Strategic Studies (IISS), Austin said while President Joe Biden’s administration sought a “constructive, stable” relationship with China, it would “not flinch when our interests are threatened”.

He said Beijing’s claims over the South China Sea – estimated to hold about 11 billion barrels of oil and 190 trillion cubic feet of natural gas – had “no basis in international law”, adding that the assertion “treads on the sovereignty of the states in the region”.

<https://www.scmp.com/week-asia/politics/article/3142908/south-china-sea-us-will-ensure-all-nations-can-benefit-resource>

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6. Cost Of Being Unprepared For Next Pandemic Will Be Too Great: Ng Eng Hen

(STRAITS TIMES 28 JUL 21) ... Lim Min Zhang

SINGAPORE - Plans must be in place for more coordinated efforts to deal with the next pandemic and other common challenges as the cost of getting caught unprepared again will be too great, said Defence Minister Ng Eng

He on Wednesday (July 28).

Giving the keynote address at the 7th International Maritime Security Conference, he said that this was one key but obvious lesson that can be learnt from the Covid-19 pandemic so far, as countries have grown interdependent because of globalisation.

The disruption in logistics and supply lines brought home that interdependency vividly, he said. Early in the pandemic last year, trade in goods dropped faster than during the Great Depression or the global financial crisis.

For example, entire assembly lines had to be shut down in the South Korean auto industry because of a shortage of spare parts. Drug shortages were reported too, including life-supporting drugs needed to treat Covid-19 patients, he noted.

Maritime trade was impacted in many ways, with many commercial seafarers who were stranded at sea as ports would not let them in, he said.

The blockage of the Suez Canal in March this year - where 12 per cent of global trade passes through - compounded the problem, he said.

While there was no inherent malfeasance in those disruptions and they were not aimed at any particular country, "it exposed an existing vulnerability which can be exploited by those who would do us harm intentionally".

He added: "After watching the devastation and loss of lives due to Covid-19, now four million and rising, the cost of unpreparedness and dis-coordination will be too great.

"Whether it is from the next biologic pandemic or the dreaded Disease X which is more lethal, more infectious. And whether unintentionally or as a result of a bioweapon in the wrong hands."

The need for more coordinated efforts also apply for other natural disasters and threats related to climate change, he added.

He said that militaries can and must play a decisive role in this multilateral effort, such as in the areas of information sharing and having rules to prevent inadvertent conflict at sea and elsewhere.

They can also build confidence in peacetime and engage in practical ways to deepen trust and mutual understanding, including through the conference, he said.

The one-day conference, held in a hybrid format with the majority of participants from 28 countries attending virtually, is co-organised by the Republic of Singapore Navy (RSN) and the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies.

It was established in 2009, and brings together navy chiefs, policymakers, academics and maritime stakeholders to discuss ways to enhance and foster mutual security in the maritime domain, including those from China, Japan, France and Malaysia.

The Ministry of Defence said on Wednesday that all participants who attended the event physically had been fully vaccinated and abided by health and safety measures, in line with national guidelines.

One of the participants was US Chief of Naval Operations, Admiral Michael Gilday, who gave a speech emphasising the importance of cooperation in allowing for prosperity from the sea. He is on an introductory visit to Singapore from Monday to Thursday.

Speaking to reporters in a virtual press conference, Admiral Gilday said that he looked forward to increasing the tempo of exercises with the RSN, adding that exercises with Singapore in the past few months have been "pretty robust".

"The US-Singapore partnership... is really the bedrock of America's military presence in South-east Asia, and an

anchor for security in the broader Indo-Pacific," he said.

Asked if the US Navy plans to increase its deployment of littoral combat ships (LCS) to Singapore, he said there were no current plans to increase the numbers.

He said: "We have what we think right now is a solid operating model that meets our operational commitments.

"In the future, I would like to see more LCS operating in the Western Pacific, but we have not yet settled on what the basing model might be."

<https://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/cost-of-being-unprepared-for-next-pandemic-will-be-too-great-ng-eng-hen>

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SECDEF:

7. Pentagon Chief Seeks To Nudge Ties With Vietnam As Human Rights Concerns Linger

(REUTERS 28 JUL 21) ... Idrees Ali

HANOI - U.S. Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin sought on Thursday to nudge forward security ties with Vietnam that have been slowly deepening as both countries watch China's activities in the South China Sea with growing alarm.

Despite closer military relations, more than four decades after the Vietnam War ended in 1975, President Joe Biden's administration has said there are limits to the relationship until Hanoi makes progress on human rights.

Vietnam has emerged as the most vocal opponent of China's territorial claims in the South China Sea and has received U.S. military hardware, including coastguard cutters.

Before a meeting with his Vietnamese counterpart in Hanoi, Austin said the United States did not ask Vietnam to choose between countries.

"One of our central goals is ensuring that our allies and partners have the freedom and the space to chart their own futures," Austin said.

He did not mention China but there is a perception in Asia that China is making countries choose between it and the United States, as tension rises between those two big powers.

On Wednesday, a U.S. Navy warship carried out a transit through the Taiwan Strait. While such operations are routine, they usually anger Beijing.

"(Vietnam) wants to know that the U.S. is going to remain engaged militarily, it's going to continue its presence in the South China Sea," said Greg Poling, with the Center for Strategic and International Studies.

The two sides signed a "memorandum of understanding" for Harvard and Texas Tech University to create a database that would help Vietnamese search for those missing from the war.

Limits

On Sunday, the United States shipped 3 million doses of the Moderna COVID-19 vaccine to Vietnam, raising the amount given by the United States, via the global COVAX vaccine scheme, to 5 million doses.

Poling said there was a limit to how fast and far the Vietnamese were comfortable with deepening ties.

Experts say there are lingering concerns in Vietnam about Biden's predecessor, Donald Trump, withdrawing from the Trans Pacific Partnership trade pact in 2017.

There are also limits to how far the United States is willing to deepen relations before Vietnam improves its human rights record.

Vietnam has undergone sweeping economic reforms and social change in recent decades, but the ruling Communist Party retains a tight grip over media and tolerates little dissent. [read more](#)

In Singapore on Tuesday, Austin said the United States would always lead with its values.

"We will discuss those values with our friends and allies everywhere we go and we don't make any bones about that," Austin said.

This month, Marc Knapper, Biden's nominee to be the next U.S. ambassador to Vietnam vowed to boost security ties but said they could only reach their full potential if Hanoi made significant progress on human rights.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/pentagon-chief-nudge-ties-with-vietnam-human-rights-concerns-linger-2021-07-28/>

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8. As Tensions With China Mount, U.S. Defense Secretary Visits Vietnam, Vows Support For Region

(ASSOCIATED PRESS 28 JUL 21)

HANOI, Vietnam — U.S. Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin is seeking to bolster ties with Vietnam, one of the Southeast Asian nations embroiled in a territorial rift with China, during a two-day visit starting Wednesday.

In a speech in Singapore, his first stop in the region he is visiting for the first time as member of President Joe Biden's Cabinet, Austin said Tuesday he was committed to pursuing a constructive, stable relationship with China, including stronger crisis communications with the People's Liberation Army.

But he repeated that Beijing's claim to virtually the entire South China Sea "has no basis in international law" and "treads on the sovereignty of states in the region."

He said the U.S. continues to support the region's coastal states in upholding their rights under international law, and remains committed to the defense treaty obligations the U.S. has with Japan and the Philippines.

"Unfortunately, Beijing's unwillingness to resolve disputes peacefully and respect the rule of law isn't just occurring on the water," Austin said. "We have also seen aggression against India ... destabilizing military activity and other forms of coercion against the people of Taiwan ... and genocide and crimes against humanity against Uyghur Muslims in Xinjiang."

In Beijing, Foreign Ministry spokesperson Zhao Lijian responded to Austin.

“The U.S. ignored the facts, deliberately smeared China, interfered in China’s internal affairs and sowed discords among regional countries with the aim of serving its own geopolitical interest,” Zhao said at a regular news briefing. “We admonish the U.S. side not to make an issue about China at every turn and do more for the benefit of peace and stability in the region.”

Austin is scheduled to meet his Vietnamese counterpart, Phan Van Giang, on Thursday morning. He leaves for the Philippines on Friday.

Vietnam and the Philippines are among China’s fiercest opponents in the territorial disputes in the South China Sea, where Beijing has ignored its neighbors’ protests and has constructed several islands equipped with airstrips and military installations. Vietnam has previously accused China of obstructing its gas exploration activities off its southern shores.

Austin’s visit comes as Vietnam is in the grip of a coronavirus surge, with Hanoi and half of the country in lockdown.

The U.S. has donated 5 million doses of the Moderna vaccine, part of the 80 million doses that Biden pledged to lower-income nations around the world.

<https://www.militarytimes.com/news/your-military/2021/07/28/as-tensions-with-china-mount-us-defense-secretary-visits-vietnam-vows-support-for-region/>

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9. U.S. Defence Secretary Lloyd Austin’s Vietnam Visit To Focus On Maritime Cooperation, Distrust Over Wartime History

(SOUTH CHINA MORNING POST 28 JUL 21) ... Bac Pham

US Defence Secretary Lloyd Austin arrived in Vietnam on Wednesday for talks that are expected to focus heavily on security and military cooperation between the erstwhile enemies, along with Washington’s plan to help Southeast Asia tackle Covid-19 and its post-pandemic recovery.

Sources say discussions on Thursday between Austin and his counterpart General Phan Van Giang in Hanoi will cover the provision of US coastguard ships to Vietnam for maritime patrols and the possibility of a third American aircraft carrier visit to signal closer strategic ties between the countries.

They are also expected to sign a memorandum of understanding (MOU) on the legacy of the Vietnam war, which ended in 1975 with the communist victory over South Vietnam and the withdrawal of US troops.

The MOU will see the United States help Vietnam locate, identify and recover the remains of hundreds of thousands of Vietnamese soldiers who died during the war and are still listed as missing in action, a matter of great emotional significance to their families.

Austin will visit Hoa Lo prison – the “Hanoi Hilton”, as the facility was known to American pilots detained during the war – on Wednesday, before meeting Prime Minister Pham Minh Chinh and President Nguyen Xuan Phuc on Thursday morning.

Analysts said the visit by Austin, a top member of US President Joe Biden's administration, was meant to underscore Washington's commitment to strengthening ties with Vietnam.

Both countries normalised relations in 1995 and have agreed, under successive US presidents, to cooperate more closely, including in confronting China's expanding influence in Southeast Asia.

Vietnam is among the most vocal opponents of Beijing's claims in the disputed South China Sea, even as it maintains cordial ties with its largest trading partner.

Le Hong Hiep, a senior fellow at the ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute in Singapore, said Washington and Hanoi saw each other as important partners.

"Due to China's growing assertiveness, the two countries are now increasingly interested in pursuing deeper bilateral defence cooperation, especially in the South China Sea. The visit by Secretary Austin is aimed at driving bilateral relations in that direction," Hiep said.

Given their history as adversaries and Hanoi's wish to preserve relations with Beijing, US-Vietnam military cooperation has not taken place as regularly as collaboration in other areas. However, the interest in deepening defence ties has grown since 2014, after Hanoi and Beijing were embroiled in a tense stand-off in the South China Sea. China at the time deployed an oil rig for 10 weeks in waters that Vietnam considers its exclusive economic zone, sparking a major row.

The Biden administration has signalled its intentions to deepen ties with Hanoi, with Marc Knapper, the president's nominee for the next ambassador to Vietnam, telling a Senate hearing earlier this month that there were hopes to raise their current comprehensive partnership – which encompasses a pledge to work together on a range of issues – to a strategic partnership.

"I will take steps to do that by strengthening even further our security relationships with Vietnam," Knapper said.

Carl Thayer, professor emeritus of politics at the University of New South Wales and a Southeast Asia expert, said Austin was likely to sound out Vietnam's leaders on the prospect of upgrading the partnership and "learn their views on what should be priorities in their defence cooperation relationship and in dealing with Chinese assertiveness in the South China Sea".

On his part, Thayer said, Austin would stress Washington's commitment to stability and security in the disputed waterway and support for regional countries to stand up to Beijing. "These discussions likely will be more of an exchange of views on strategic issues, how to manage relations with China, and Vietnamese priorities for future defence cooperation."

Dr Pham Quang Minh, former dean of the University for Social Science and Humanities in Hanoi, said there was also a possibility both sides could discuss arms sales or the transfer of military equipment.

The US in 2016 lifted a ban on the sale of lethal weapons to Vietnam, but no sales have taken place since, with Hanoi relying on Russian arms. When he visited in 2017, former US president Donald Trump urged Vietnamese leaders to buy US missiles and defence systems.

"As a military power, the US wants to sell weapons to Vietnam," Minh said. "Vietnam also used American weapons obtained after the Vietnam war. With US weapons, Vietnam would strengthen its defence in the face of security tensions in the South China Sea."

This was something Beijing would monitor, he said, though it would not likely publicly oppose rapprochement over wartime history between Vietnam and the US.

Added Hiep from the ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute: "China does not want to see stronger defence ties between the US and Vietnam as well as other regional countries. However, the strategic dynamism in the region is currently not working in China's favour.

“In particular, China’s growing assertiveness in the South China Sea is alienating many Southeast Asian countries and causing them to raise questions about China’s strategic intentions.”

With Vietnam now battling a surge of Covid-19 cases that has sparked lockdowns in major cities and stalled industrial production, analysts said both sides would also discuss plans to help the country boost its vaccination campaign.

Vietnam has only administered 4.8 million doses to its almost 100 million people, though it has more than 14 million doses in stock, including 5 million via the Covax Facility vaccine-sharing scheme.

Vietnam’s Ambassador to the US, Ha Kim Ngoc, said Washington was considering donating more vaccines to Vietnam, while the country had also secured deals with a Japanese drug maker to produce Covid-19 inoculations.

Former dean Minh, a respected foreign policy expert in Vietnam, said he believed Hanoi’s hosting of Austin as it was coping with a Covid-19 outbreak showed the importance it placed on ties with the US.

“In the context of Vietnam’s concentration on fighting the pandemic, that Vietnam still invites and welcomes the US Defence Secretary is a clear indication that the visit has a crucial meaning to both US and Vietnam,” he said.

“[If it was a] superficial relationship, who would visit each other in the middle of a global pandemic? This visit is the demonstration of the next level of mutual trust.”

<https://www.scmp.com/week-asia/politics/article/3142868/us-defence-secretary-lloyd-austins-vietnam-visit-focus-security>

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10. ‘We’re Better Than That’: Austin Speaks About ‘Un-American’ Discrimination Against Asians

(STARS AND STRIPES 28 JUL 21) ... David Choi

Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin, speaking in Singapore on Tuesday, recognized discrimination against Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders in the United States, but said that while the U.S. "doesn't always get it right," admitting its flaws is a unique characteristic of democracy.

Delivering the Fullerton Lecture at the International Institute for Strategic Studies, Austin also emphasized the importance of partnerships and transparency in the international community, namely countries in Southeast Asia.

"Our partnerships draw strength from our shared belief in greater openness, and our belief that people live best when they govern themselves," he said.

But "our democratic values aren't always easy to reach" and the U.S. "doesn't always get it right," the defense chief added.

"We've seen some painful lapses, like the unacceptable and frankly un-American discrimination that some Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders have endured in my country in recent months," Austin said.

Reports of anti-Asian hate crime rose dramatically in major cities during the first quarter of this year compared to the same period in 2020, according to a study by the Center for the Study of Hate and Extremism at California State University, San Bernadino.

The compilation of policing data, published in June, found that Asian hate crime reports in that period rose 262% in New York City, 80% in Los Angeles and 60% in Boston.

The university published a separate analysis in March that found anti-Asian hate crime in 16 of the largest U.S. cities had risen 145% in 2020. The analysis noted that "the first spike" of reports occurred in March and April "amidst a rise in COVID cases and negative stereotyping of Asians relating to the pandemic."

Vivid descriptions of attacks from across the country did not go unnoticed by the international community.

United Nations representatives expressed their "serious concern" after finding "racially motivated violence and other incidents against Asian-Americans have reached an alarming level across the United States since the outbreak of COVID19."

In one of several cases cited by the U.N., "an older white man pushed a seven-year-old biracial (half-white, half-Asian) girl from her bike in the park and yelled at her white dad: 'Take your hybrid kids home because they're making everyone sick.'"

Referencing anti-Asian discrimination in the U.S., Austin said: "I believe that we're better than that. Far better than that.

"We aren't trying to hide our mistakes. When a democracy stumbles, everyone can see and hear it. It's broadcast in loud and living color, and not hushed up by the state."

America's willingness to admit its flaws "gives us the built-in ability to self-correct, and to strive towards a more perfect union," Austin added. "And when we come up short, when we stray from our Constitution's wisdom, we have a pretty good track record of owning up and trying to do better."

President Joe Biden signed legislation in May to address the rise of hate crime against Asian Americans. The bill aims to make hate crime reports more accessible to law enforcement officials and is expected to expedite reviews of hate crimes in the country.

<https://www.military.com/daily-news/2021/07/28/were-better-austin-speaks-about-un-american-discrimination-against-asians.html>

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STRATEGIC COMPETITION:

11. Destroyer Makes 7th U.S. Navy Taiwan Strait Transit in 2021

(USNI NEWS 28 JUL 21) ... Mallory Shelbourne

A U.S. guided-missile destroyer moved through the Taiwan Strait on Wednesday, marking the seventh transit of the waters this year by an American warship.

Destroyer USS Benfold (DDG-65) performed the transit, U.S. 7th Fleet announced.

“The ship’s transit through the Taiwan Strait demonstrates the U.S. commitment to a free and open Indo-Pacific. The United States military flies, sails, and operates anywhere international law allows,” Japan-based 7th Fleet said in a news release.

USS Curtis Wilbur (DDG-54) performed the last Taiwan Strait transit in June, USNI News previously reported.

Benfold earlier this month performed a freedom of navigation operation near the Paracel Islands, USNI News reported at the time. China, Vietnam and Taiwan have all staked claims to the islands.

At the time, the Navy denied a claim from China that its military chased Benfold out of the South China Sea.

“The PLA(N)’s statement is the latest in a long string of PRC actions to misrepresent lawful U.S. maritime operations and assert its excessive and illegitimate maritime claims at the expense of its Southeast Asian neighbors in the South China Sea,” 7th Fleet said in a news release at the time. “The PRC’s behavior stands in contrast to the United States’ adherence to international law and our vision for a free and open Indo-Pacific region. All nations, large and small, should be secure in their sovereignty, free from coercion, and able to pursue economic growth consistent with accepted international rules and norms.”

China regularly protests U.S. freedom of navigation operations and strait transits in the region.

<https://news.usni.org/2021/07/28/destroyer-makes-7th-u-s-navy-taiwan-strait-transit-in-2021>

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12. Chinese Military Drills Simulate Amphibious Landing And Island Seizure In Battle Conditions

(SOUTH CHINA MORNING POST 28 JUL 21) ... Kristin Huang

The Chinese military has conducted yet another drill featuring assault landing and island-control exercises, Chinese state media reported on Tuesday, continuing its training to boost soldiers’ combat readiness in case of insurgency in the Taiwan Strait.

In addition, the People’s Liberation Army has staged drills in the South China Sea as British aircraft carrier HMS Queen Elizabeth sailed through the disputed waters.

An amphibious synthetic brigade under the Xiamen-headquartered 73rd Group Army recently conducted a drill on China’s Southeast Coast, an exercise in the military’s capability of conducting cross-sea island seizure operations.

The PLA has conducted a series of drills with a focus on Taiwan in recent years. Beijing regards Taiwan as a breakaway province to be reunified by force if necessary.

According to data compiled by the South China Morning Post , China conducted 20 naval exercises involving elements of island capture in the first half of the year alone, exceeding the 13 such exercises carried out during 2020.

In the most recent drill, the Chinese military incorporated two types of drones, amphibious assault vehicles, self-propelled howitzers, multiple launch rocket systems among their weaponry, according to video footage from China’s state broadcaster CCTV.

The drill was held in an environment close to a real battlefield in which a small group of front soldiers performed missions at night, amphibious assault vehicles fired guns at sea while heading to the beach and much of the exercise was conducted in weather above 40 degrees Celsius (104 degrees Fahrenheit).

Song Zhongping, a former PLA instructor, said this drill – although only a small part of an actual operation to take over Taiwan – further enhanced the army’s combat ability and reflected China’s growing confidence in implementing a holistic military mission.

“Deterrence cannot solve problems, only concrete actions can work to defend Beijing’s sovereignty and territorial integrity,” Song said.

China is also holding drills over the South China Sea. China’s maritime authority released two notices saying China would hold two separate military drills in the South China Sea, respectively in areas off the coast of Guangdong’s Jiangmen and Maoming city.

Drills near Chuandao took place from Tuesday and Thursday and involved live-fire exercises, while the exercise near Maoming, from Sunday to Tuesday, was a normal military exercise, according to two notices from the China Maritime Safety Administration.

The drills came as the British flagship military vessel HMS Queen Elizabeth, the largest vessel ever built for the Royal Navy and capable of carrying up to 40 aircraft, entered the disputed South China Sea for the first time on Monday. The aircraft carrier led a flotilla.

Wu Shicun, president of China’s National Institute for South China Sea Studies, said in an article on Tuesday that the Elizabeth aircraft carrier strike group would not stop at exercising “freedom of navigation” in the South China Sea.

If the ship entered within 12 nautical miles of Chinese-controlled islands, Beijing “must conduct countermeasures to let them pay the price and prevent other countries from doing the same in the South China Sea”, Wu said.

On the same day, the Chinese embassy in the United Kingdom issued a statement urging the British government to respect the fact that China’s sovereignty, rights and interests in the South China Sea have abundant historical and legal basis.

https://www.scmp.com/news/china/military/article/3142851/chinese-military-drills-simulate-amphibious-landing-and-island?module=perpetual_scroll&pgtype=article&campaign=3142851

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13. China’s Ambassador To U.S. Is ‘Willing To Ruffle Feathers’

Qin Gang rose from working for a foreign news agency to becoming a trusted aide to Xi Jinping, China’s top leader.

(NEW YORK TIMES 29 JUL 21) ... Chris Buckley

China’s new ambassador to the United States arrived in Washington on Wednesday — Qin Gang, a diplomat whose record of vigorously contesting Western criticism suggests that Beijing is steeling for extended tensions with Washington.

In his new role, Mr. Qin will be at the front of efforts by China’s top leader, Xi Jinping, to reshape China’s relationship with Washington, which has spiraled to its lowest point in decades. Beijing sees the Biden administration as continuing to challenge China’s rise, and it has pushed back against Washington’s efforts to rally democratic countries to its side.

Mr. Qin will most likely convey to Washington that Mr. Xi expects his country to be treated as a great power, reflecting a confidence that stems in part from China's success in controlling the coronavirus epidemic. Chinese diplomats showed that emboldened posture this week in talks with the Deputy Secretary of State Wendy R. Sherman, and in March, when they publicly sparred with Biden administration officials in an unusually rancorous opening encounter in Anchorage.

In a message on the Chinese Embassy's website, Mr. Qin said that both countries should "treat each other with mutual respect and equality, and pursue peaceful coexistence and win-win cooperation."

Unlike nearly all of China's ambassadors to Washington since the 1980s, Mr. Qin has never specialized in dealing with the United States, nor has he been posted there previously. But as the head of the information office of the Chinese Foreign Ministry, and later the chief of protocol, Mr. Qin appears to have won the trust of Mr. Xi and has regularly accompanied him during trips abroad and in meetings with foreign leaders.

"It's a telling moment," said Drew Thompson, a former Pentagon official responsible for China.

"For the last 20 years you've had a string of America experts posted to Washington," Mr. Thompson, who now teaches at the National University of Singapore, said in an interview. "Somebody whose career has been staked more on upholding the dignity and equal treatment of Chinese senior leaders will come to the job potentially with a different mind-set."

During Mr. Xi's visit to the United States in 2015, Mr. Qin was "willing to ruffle feathers without hesitation when he felt it was necessary," said Ryan Hass, a senior fellow at the Brookings Institution who was director for China at the National Security Council during Mr. Xi's visit.

"Qin Gang was very attentive to how his leader would be portrayed and the image that his leader's public appearances would send," Mr. Hass said. "This was particularly the case around President Xi's state visit to the White House."

As ambassador, Mr. Qin will be navigating an increasingly thorny and politically charged relationship. Chinese diplomats have furiously denounced Washington's sanctions over Mr. Xi's hard-line policies in the far western region of Xinjiang and the city of Hong Kong. But they are also trying to find common ground on international threats like limiting global warming.

Mr. Xi, China's most influential leader in decades, has sought to position Beijing as an increasingly powerful counterweight to an international order dominated by the United States. In internal comments to Communist Party officials last year, he struck an assertive yet measured note about the relationship, saying that "the East is rising and the West is declining," but that American resilience should not be underestimated.

As the Biden administration has signaled it would continue to build alliances around the world to contest China, Mr. Xi has warned that Beijing should not be marginalized in global affairs, and is prepared to push back against Western pressure.

"The Chinese people will never allow foreign forces to bully, oppress or enslave us," he said in speech marking 100 years since the founding of the Chinese Communist Party on July 1. "Whoever nurses delusions of doing that will crack their heads and spill blood on the Great Wall of steel built from the flesh and blood of 1.4 billion Chinese people."

Mr. Qin, 55, appears well suited to promoting Mr. Xi's more muscular international stance.

His predecessor as ambassador to Washington, Cui Tiankai, vigorously defended China's policies after taking that post in 2013, but distanced himself from the rancorous rhetoric and Covid conspiracy theories of some rising Chinese diplomats.

"Chinese-U. S. relations are now at a crucial crossroads," Mr. Cui said in a farewell message last month on the Chinese Embassy's website.

Mr. Qin has a milder manner than the “wolf warriors,” as China’s more combative diplomats who have recently come to the fore have been called. But as a spokesman for the Foreign Ministry, he set an early example for China’s increasingly pugnacious response to Western pressure.

After graduating from the University of International Relations in Beijing, Mr. Qin worked as a news assistant at United Press International’s bureau in Beijing before joining the Foreign Ministry’s diplomatic corps in 1992. He gained prominence after he was appointed as a spokesman for the ministry in 2005, as China faced growing international tensions over human rights, as well as Beijing’s tough policies in Tibet and Xinjiang.

Mr. Qin was adept at sparring with journalists during news briefings, sometimes responding to questions with sardonic mockery. He likened the Communist Party’s takeover of Tibet to Abraham Lincoln’s emancipation of enslaved Black people. He chided journalists “not to report based on your delusions.” Asked in 2008 about “Chinese Democracy,” a hard-rock album released by Guns N’ Roses, Mr. Qin was dismissive.

“It’s my understanding that many people don’t like this kind of music because it’s too raucous and noisy,” he said to the journalist who asked about the album. “I’m guessing that you’re a mature adult, aren’t you?”

As a spokesman, Mr. Qin “never skirted around a question, and his attitude was clear-cut and forthright,” said a profile of him published in 2018 by his alma mater in Beijing, when he was promoted to deputy foreign minister. “He is not evasive and does not beat around the bush.”

Mr. Qin rose through the Foreign Ministry division that deals with Western Europe and later served as a senior diplomat in London. In the next stage of his rise — leading the information operations of the Foreign Ministry and then overseeing the protocol for leaders’ trips abroad and meetings with visiting foreign leaders — he focused on protecting the image of China and of Mr. Xi.

Mr. Qin’s appointment may reflect that “the Chinese system seems to be in a phase of favoring unswerving loyalty to the party above diplomatic achievement,” said Daniel Russel, a former American diplomat who is now a vice president at the Asia Society Policy Institute.

As vice foreign minister, Mr. Qin has been a vocal defender of Chinese policies, summoning foreign diplomats in Beijing to express official displeasure with their governments’ statements on Xinjiang and other contentious issues.

“Internationally, there are some anti-China forces concocting all kinds of lies to contain China’s development,” he said last year at a reception organized by the German Embassy in Beijing, according to the Chinese Foreign Ministry. “The 1.4 billion Chinese people will never agree to this.”

<https://www.nytimes.com/2021/07/28/world/asia/china-ambassador-qin-gang.html>

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14. Beijing Plans New Sanction Laws for Hong Kong, Macau

Rules threaten to punish companies that comply with U.S. and European bans

(WALL STREET JOURNAL 29 JUL 21) ... Elaine Yu

China’s government is planning to introduce new laws in Hong Kong and Macau that could bar foreign entities and individuals in the cities from complying with sanctions against China, according to people familiar with the discussions.

The new laws are expected to mirror China's own "antiforeign sanctions law," which Beijing rushed through in June in response to sanctions imposed on the country by the U.S. and Europe, the people said.

China's official Xinhua News Agency reported on Tuesday that the country's legislature was scheduled to add provisions to the mini-constitutions of Hong Kong and Macau during a four-day session beginning Aug. 17, though it didn't specify what changes would be made.

The introduction of the law in the two Chinese territories, especially in the financial hub of Hong Kong, could leave many companies and their employees caught in the middle as China and the U.S. clash over the future of the former British colony.

"The real conflict, which is what people are really concerned with, are cases where companies are obliged to follow a sanction and there is a prohibition against complying with it in Hong Kong," said Nicholas Turner, a lawyer at Steptoe & Johnson LLP who specializes in economic sanctions.

Hong Kong's Constitutional and Mainland Affairs Bureau didn't immediately respond to a request for comment. China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs didn't immediately reply to an email seeking comments.

Calls to the Hong Kong and Macao Affairs Office of the State Council went unanswered outside of business hours.

Earlier this month, the Biden administration cautioned American businesses and individuals working for them about the risks of operating in Hong Kong, where Beijing has imposed a sweeping new national security law.

The White House also added seven officials working in China's main government office in Hong Kong to a sanctions list, and warned American businesses they could face retaliation for complying with U.S. sanctions.

The new Chinese law mandates that Beijing respond to foreign sanctions with countermeasures against the entities or individuals involved in imposing them. The countermeasures include denying and revoking visas or expulsion, seizing and freezing assets within China, blocking transactions and cooperation with Chinese individuals and entities, as well as "other necessary measures" that aren't specified.

The law also allows Chinese companies to file lawsuits in Chinese courts against foreign business partners who cut ties to comply with foreign sanctions.

It couldn't be determined which of the Chinese law's provisions would be added to the new laws in Hong Kong and Macau or how they would be applied.

These uncertainties make it difficult to precisely assess the law's impact on Hong Kong, said Steptoe & Johnson's Mr. Turner. Chinese government ministries don't ordinarily have legal authority in Hong Kong and the work of interpreting and providing guidance about the law will likely fall on somebody in Hong Kong, he said.

Cases handled under the common law system of Hong Kong—which is known for its independent judiciary—could lead to very different outcomes than in mainland China, Mr. Turner added. But the courts could face pressure from authorities to apply the new law in ways that could be seen as compromising their independence.

"So that's a concern for the business community," he said.

Over the past year, the U.S. and European Union have imposed sanctions on an ever-expanding list of businesses and individuals in China whom they accuse of unfair industrial practices, carrying out forced assimilation against ethnic minorities in the remote Xinjiang region, and suppressing civil liberties in Hong Kong.

Beijing has denied the allegations and promised retaliation, depicting the sanctions as violations of its sovereignty.

China made use of its new law last week when it sanctioned seven Americans, including former U.S. Commerce Secretary Wilbur Ross, in response to the latest U.S. penalties. The announcement was made days before U.S. Deputy Secretary of State Wendy Sherman met China's foreign minister in the Chinese port city of Tianjin.

“Beijing has chipped away at Hong Kong’s reputation of accountable, transparent governance and respect for individual freedoms,” Secretary of State Antony Blinken said in a statement about the advisory to American businesses.

The Chinese Communist Party’s mouthpiece People’s Daily said in a commentary following the announcement of counter-sanctions that China’s determination to resist U.S. interference in Hong Kong’s affairs was indestructible.

“The U.S. should wake up from its fantasy and delusion,” it said. “The U.S. should understand that when it imposes sanctions on Hong Kong issues, China’s antforeign sanctions law will be enacted and will be truly aggressive.”

<https://www.wsj.com/articles/china-prepares-new-anti-sanction-laws-for-hong-kong-and-macau-11627475091>

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15. U.S. And Russia Hold ‘Substantive’ Strategic Stability Talks As Moscow Raps Biden For Comments

(CNN 28 JUL 21) ... Nicole Gaouette and Kylie Atwood

US and Russian officials had “professional and substantive talks” on strategic stability in Switzerland, the State Department said in a statement Wednesday.

Deputy Secretary of State Wendy Sherman led a delegation of US officials in a meeting with Russian Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs Sergey Ryabkov, the first in a series of “integrated Strategic Stability Dialogue” talks arranged in June at President Joe Biden’s summit with Russian President Vladimir Putin.

These strategic talks come as Russia is amassing military might in the Arctic and testing its newest weapons, including an unmanned stealth torpedo powered by a nuclear reactor. State Department spokesman Ned Price said in a statement that, “we remain committed, even in times of tension, to ensuring predictability and reducing the risk of armed conflict and threat of nuclear war.”

Washington and Moscow are at odds over issues ranging from ransomware attacks that have penetrated US government agencies, to Russia’s Nord Stream 2 pipeline, its interference in Ukraine and its detention of Americans. Even so, the Biden administration has stressed that it still seeks to cooperate with Moscow on areas of mutual concern, including climate change.

The meeting was the first in a series of planned engagements meant to improve communication and reduce the possibility of diplomatic missteps at a time of strained relations between the two countries. This first meeting convened as Moscow rapped Biden for remarks about the shaky state of Russia’s economy and the dangers that presents.

‘A real shooting war’

During remarks at the Office of the Director of National Intelligence on Tuesday, Biden warned that Russia is already interfering in the 2022 US midterm elections, that an increase in cyber attacks could lead to war, and that the weakness of Putin’s position makes him even more dangerous.

“We’ve seen how cyber threats, including ransomware attacks, increasingly are able to cause damage and disruption in the real world,” Biden said. “I can’t guarantee this, and they’re as informed as I am, but I think it’s more likely we’re going to end up, we end up in a war. A real shooting war with major power. It’s gonna be as a consequence of a cyber break of great consequence.”

“When I was with Mr. Putin, who has a real problem — he is — he’s sitting on top of an economy that has nuclear weapons and oil wells and nothing else,” Biden said. “Nothing else. Their economy is — what? — the eighth smallest in the world now — largest in the world? He knows — he knows he’s in real trouble, which makes him even more dangerous, in my view.”

The Kremlin said on Wednesday Biden was wrong in his assessment that Russia only has nuclear weapons and oil.

“At the very least, they are inherently wrong,” Kremlin Dmitri Peskov said on a conference call with journalists. “The President of the United States spoke about our President, speaking in front of [US] National Intelligence officers. It is clear that such bravura statements are in demand among this audience.

“Obviously, Biden is voicing the messages that are being prepared by his apparatus, his employees. We can see an erroneous knowledge and understanding of modern Russia here,” he said.

Peskov said the Kremlin regrets the US is more of an opponent than a partner despite Putin “repeatedly” demonstrating the “political will” to normalize relations:

At Wednesday’s talks, “the US delegation discussed US policy priorities and the current security environment, national perceptions of threats to strategic stability, prospects for new nuclear arms control, and the format for future Strategic Stability Dialogue sessions,” Price said.

Biden renewed the New START nuclear arms control agreement with Russia during his first month in office, but both countries have said that more work needs to be done to reduce conflict and address new areas of competition.

The space race and cyber offensive capabilities are expected to be on the agenda, sources familiar with the plans have said. Price said the two delegations agreed to meet again at the end of September and to hold informal consultations in the interim to determine topics for expert working groups going forward.

Price also said that senior officials from the State Department and Pentagon will now travel to Brussels, Belgium, to brief allies at NATO headquarters.

After the meetings Wednesday, Ryabkov told TASS news agency that the US showed up in Geneva ready for constructive dialogue.

“They are ready,” TASS quoted the deputy foreign minister as saying. “This is a good thing. They [the US] sent an impressive delegation representing all departments.”

Ryabkov said the US “worked through its agenda 100%” and that there were no surprises for the Russian delegation.

The more formal Russian readout of the meeting was brief. “In accordance with the instructions of the Presidents of the two countries, a comprehensive discussion was held on the approaches of the parties to maintaining strategic stability, the prospects for arms control and measures to reduce risks,” the statement said. “Various aspects of the further development of cooperation on this topic were touched upon.”

<https://www.cnn.com/2021/07/28/politics/us-russia-strategic-talks/index.html>

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16. U.S., Russia Hold Nuclear Talks In Geneva After Summit Push

(REUTERS 28 JUL 21) ... Stephanie Nebehay and Jonathan Landay

GENEVA/WASHINGTON - Senior U.S. and Russian officials on Wednesday restarted talks on easing tensions between the world's largest nuclear weapons powers and agreed to reconvene in September after informal consultations, the State Department said.

U.S. Deputy Secretary of State Wendy Sherman and Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov headed their delegations at the meeting at the U.S. diplomatic mission in Geneva.

TASS news agency cited Ryabkov as saying he was satisfied with the consultations and that the United States showed readiness for a constructive dialogue at the talks.

Armed with mandates from their leaders, it was the first time in nearly a year that the sides had held so-called strategic stability talks amid frictions over a range of issues, including arms control.

U.S. President Joe Biden and Russian President Vladimir Putin, whose countries hold 90% of the world's nuclear weapons, agreed in June to launch a bilateral dialogue on strategic stability to "lay the groundwork for future arms control and risk reduction measures".

After informal consultations aimed at "determining topics for expert working groups" in the next round, the two sides agreed to reconvene in late September, State Department spokesman Ned Price said in a statement.

Calling the discussions "professional and substantive," he said the U.S. side discussed its policy priorities, the current international security environment, "the prospects for new nuclear arms control" and the format for further talks.

The decision to meet again showed the sides understand the need to resolve arms control disputes, a senior State Department official said, that have seen an end to several Cold War-era treaties, including one that limited intermediate-range missiles.

"We know we have a responsibility as the largest nuclear weapons states to find a way to improve strategic stability to deal with a deteriorating arms control architecture," the official briefed reporters on condition of anonymity.

That includes dealing with threats posed by "new emerging technologies that can upset strategic stability," the official said.

Such new threats could include artificial intelligence-controlled weapons, possible cyber attacks on existing nuclear weapons systems and more esoteric arms such as highly maneuverable aerial or submerged hypersonic weapons that can evade defenses.

Andrey Baklitskiy, senior research fellow at the Center for Advanced American Studies at Moscow State Institute of International Relations, told reporters in Geneva: "We are starting with a new U.S. administration, starting pretty much from scratch.

"It's just meet and greet and try to establish some basic understandings," he said.

Russia and the United States in February extended for five years the bilateral New START nuclear arms control treaty days before it was set to expire.

The treaty limits the numbers of strategic nuclear warheads, missiles and bombers that Russia and the United States can deploy.

The two sides had been expected to discuss which weapons systems and technologies are of greatest concern.

"For example, Russia still has concerns with U.S. modification of heavy bombers and launchers to launch ballistic missiles, and that's been there for a while now," Baklitskiy said.

The Biden administration has asserted that Russia has engaged unilaterally in low-yield nuclear testing, in violation

of a nuclear testing moratorium, he said.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/us-russia-hold-nuclear-talks-geneva-after-summit-push-2021-07-28/>

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17. China Offers The Taliban A Warm Welcome While Urging Peace Talks

Worried about the war in Afghanistan, China has stepped up diplomatic efforts with the government and the group to encourage a political settlement after the U.S. withdrawal.

(NEW YORK TIMES 29 JUL 21) ... Steven Lee Myers

China offered a high-profile public stage to the Taliban on Wednesday, declaring that the group rapidly retaking large parts of Afghanistan would play “an important role in the process of peaceful reconciliation and reconstruction” of the country.

Chinese officials began two days of talks with a delegation of Taliban leaders in Tianjin, a coastal city in northeastern China, significantly raising the group’s international stature after steady military gains that have taken advantage of the withdrawal of American and NATO combat forces from Afghanistan.

China’s foreign minister, Wang Yi, called the Taliban “a pivotal military and political force,” but urged their leaders “to hold high the banner of peace talks,” according to a statement by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

He pressed the group to work to burnish its diplomatic image and extracted a public pledge that the group would not allow fighters to use Afghan territory as a base to carry out attacks inside China, according to the statement.

The Taliban have been on a regional diplomatic blitz over the last month, visiting Tehran, Moscow and the Turkmenistan capital Ashgabat for talks with officials, as their military ascendancy in Afghanistan has grown. The increasing legitimacy bestowed on the insurgents by regional leaders has been met largely with public silence from the Kabul government, and Wednesday’s visit to Beijing was not an exception.

The visit to Tianjin was the Taliban’s most significant diplomatic coup yet.

Chinese officials have met with Taliban envoys before, including a meeting in Beijing in 2019, but not at such a high level and in such a public way. This meeting underscores how much the former rulers of the country, who were toppled by the United States 20 years ago after the Sept. 11 attacks, have succeeded in reshaping how international powers deal with them.

The foreign ministry and the Chinese state news media showed Mr. Wang warmly greeting Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar, the deputy leader of the Taliban, and also posing with other Chinese diplomats and all nine members of the Taliban delegation.

Intentionally or not, the display was a sharp contrast to the frosty reception that he and other Chinese officials had offered in Tianjin two days earlier to Wendy R. Sherman, the American deputy secretary of state.

Barnett R. Rubin, a former State Department official and United Nations adviser on Afghanistan who is a senior fellow at New York University’s Center on International Cooperation, said the meeting in China was not a show of support for the Taliban but for a peaceful end to the war.

“It is an effort to use China’s influence to persuade the Taliban not to seek a military victory but to negotiate seriously for an inclusive political settlement,” he said.

China has showed growing concern about the fate of Afghanistan. It shares a short border with China at the end of a narrow, mountainous region called the Wakhan Corridor. Last month, Taliban forces seized much of the province, which borders Xinjiang, a largely Uyghur Muslim region in western China where the government has detained hundreds of thousands in the name of fighting extremism.

Mr. Wang once again on Wednesday criticized the United States and its NATO allies for a hasty withdrawal that could again plunge the country into chaos, according to the ministry statement.

Although it has not said so explicitly, China appears to be trying to act as a mediator between the Afghan government and the Taliban, encouraging some sort of political settlement.

China has long sought to play a larger diplomatic role in Afghanistan, but it was always overshadowed by the outsize influence of the United States as the leader of the military mission supporting the government in Kabul. That may be changing now that the Americans have largely withdrawn combat forces and the Taliban appear to have the military initiative.

China’s leader, Xi Jinping, spoke by telephone with Afghanistan’s president, Ashraf Ghani, on July 16, and also urged his government to find “an Afghan-led and Afghan-owned” solution.

Although China long criticized the American military involvement in Afghanistan, it also relied on it to help contain what it considered crucial to its security: the use of the country as a base for extremists fighting for the independence of Xinjiang, which separatists call East Turkestan.

After the Sept. 11 attacks, the United States designated the East Turkestan Islamic Movement as a terrorist organization, in part to cultivate China’s support for American efforts in the “war on terror.”

The Trump administration revoked the designation last year, saying there was no evidence that the group continued to carry out attacks, an assertion that China disputes. China has cited the threat of Uyghur extremism as a reason for its mass detention camps in Xinjiang.

China has other interests to protect in Afghanistan as well. It has made considerable investments in the country, including a pledge to spend \$3 billion to develop the Aynak copper mine. Many of those investments have remained stalled because of the country’s instability.

Chinese officials have in recent months signaled that Afghanistan could benefit from development projects under the country’s Belt and Road Initiative, a global effort to invest in infrastructure.

The Taliban, in previous statements, have said they would welcome Chinese investments. On Wednesday, a spokesman for the Taliban’s political office, Mohammad Naeem, thanked China for extending an invitation to meet, according to a statement posted on Twitter. The group appeared eager to address China’s main concern.

“The Islamic Emirate,” he said, “assured China that Afghan territory will not be used against the security of any country.”

<https://www.nytimes.com/2021/07/28/world/asia/china-taliban-afghanistan.html>

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Western journalists reporting on a natural disaster met with public hostility in person and online that the Chinese state media openly encouraged.

(NEW YORK TIMES 29 JUL 21) ... Li Yuan

After extreme flooding in central China last week destroyed homes, engulfed subways and killed at least 73, the ruling Communist Party found a convenient outlet for the public's pent-up emotions: the foreign news media.

A party organization in Henan Province issued a call to arms on social media to confront a BBC journalist covering the disaster there. A day later angry residents surrounded, pushed and yelled at reporters from Deutsche Welle and The Los Angeles Times. Then nationalistic commentators and news organizations used the videos and screenshots of the confrontation to wage a large-scale online attack on journalists working for foreign news outlets.

They described the Western news media's China coverage as "fake," "biased," "slandering" and "evil." They alleged that foreign reporting on the devastating floods focused on the damage instead of the rescue efforts by the government and the public. They were unhappy these journalists dared to call for transparency and accountability.

The Foreign Correspondents' Club of China said in a statement that it was "disappointed and dismayed at the growing hostility against foreign media in China, a sentiment underpinned by rising Chinese nationalism sometimes directly encouraged by Chinese officials and official entities."

The vitriol aimed at the Western news media is the inevitable outcome of the cultural war against foreign influence and the anti-intellectualism campaign that the Communist Party has waged under the leadership of Xi Jinping.

During his nine-year tenure, the party has cracked down on liberal-leaning key opinion leaders, including journalists, intellectuals, lawyers and businesspeople. It has reined in boisterous social media conversations by censoring heavily and encouraging users to report on one another. It has told the people that ideas such as democracy, media independence and human rights are driven by Western forces hostile to China.

In their place, party propaganda and nationalistic sentiment rule the day. And Western news organizations' critical coverage of China, which is usually no different from how they cover their own countries, stands out as the dissonant noise in the chorus of 1.4 billion people singing, "All glory to the Communist Party."

It doesn't matter that nearly all Western media websites are blocked in China and that the public doesn't have easy access to their reporting. The state news media and nationalistic commentators have been driving home the point, sometimes quoting former President Donald J. Trump, that journalists are the enemy of the people.

Foreign news outlets are facing more restricted access to the country and growing hostility among the Chinese public. Last year Beijing expelled more than a dozen mainland-based American reporters working for The New York Times, The Wall Street Journal and The Washington Post over a diplomatic spat with the United States. The world will have to brace for even less on-the-ground coverage of the second-largest economy and the main rival of the United States.

China has a history of officially sponsored war on foreigners. At the turn of the 19th century, the Boxer fighters, with the support of Empress Dowager Cixi, rose to eliminate foreign influence. They killed Christian missionaries and Chinese converts to Christianity.

During the Cultural Revolution, Mao Zedong's Red Guards set fire to the British Embassy in Beijing while protesters chanted, "Kill! Kill!" A Reuters journalist spent two years confined alone to a house in the city.

In recent years, Beijing has grown increasingly aggressive in attacking the Western news media for its China coverage. Last week, "wolf warrior" diplomats at the Chinese Embassy in Sri Lanka called the Reuters news agency "shameless" for using a photo of a Chinese Olympic gold medalist that the diplomats described as "ugly." The photo, which had also appeared in the Chinese state news media, shows the athlete straining to lift weight.

“Don’t put politics and ideologies above sports, and call yourself an unbiased media organization,” the embassy said on Twitter.

Even so, it was shocking last weekend when Henan’s Communist Youth League asked its 1.6 million followers on the social media platform Weibo to report the whereabouts of the BBC journalist Robin Brant, who has become a target of online harassment. Many comments under the post are menacing.

“As a student, it’s quite reasonable to walk on the street with a wrench, isn’t it?” one goes.

“As a construction worker,” another says, “it should be reasonable for me to carry a brick.”

“As a student surgeon, it should be reasonable for me to carry a scalpel,” says a third.

The next day, residents of Zhengzhou, the capital of Henan, surrounded a German TV reporter on assignment for Deutsche Welle and a reporter for The Los Angeles Times after mistaking the German reporter for Mr. Brant. The crowd got physical with the German reporter, Mathias Boelinger.

Mr. Boelinger wrote on Twitter that a group of men kept pushing him while yelling that he was a bad guy and should stop smearing China. A woman who was filming him blocked his way. When he asked who she was, she responded, “I’m Chinese.”

When one of the men said, “It’s OK if you report truthfully, having a positive view of China. Just don’t attack us,” Mr. Boelinger asked, “Can I interview you?”

The man said yes. But when Mr. Boelinger held up his camera, he objected: “Don’t interview me. I dislike you.”

Mr. Boelinger said of Mr. Brant: “I don’t know what would have happened had it really been him. The media environment in China right now is frightening.”

The BBC issued a statement on Tuesday, calling on the Chinese government to take immediate action to stop the attacks on journalists.

Since Sunday, the China-based staff for the BBC, The Los Angeles Times and others have received death threats and intimidating messages and calls, according to the Foreign Correspondents’ Club of China. Al Jazeera’s crew was followed and filmed while reporting outside a Zhengzhou subway station, while journalists for The Associated Press were stopped and reported to the police during filming in a public area. Journalists reporting on a submerged tunnel for the news agency Agence France-Presse were forced by hostile residents to delete footage and surrounded by several dozen men, according to the correspondents’ group.

When a few passers-by saw journalists for The New York Times conducting interviews on the streets of Zhengzhou this week, they yelled at interviewees not to talk, effectively ending the conversations.

“Of course, in this age, journalists will face abuse on social media, unfortunately,” William Nee of Chinese Human Rights Defenders, a nongovernmental organization based in Washington, wrote on Twitter. “But it is dangerous when the State fuels these xenophobic worldviews to achieve its own political ends, instead of creating an enabling environment for reporting.”

It is impossible to explain why so many ordinary Chinese seemed eager to attack foreign journalists covering the floods. It was a serious natural disaster and probably difficult for any city to handle. But it serves the public interest to understand whether any deaths could have been avoided.

Some people probably took their cues from the government. Last week, the Zhengzhou government quickly posted banners on the sides of the submerged tunnel saying that gawking could damage the “image” of the city.

The online mob is even more ruthless to Chinese people who dare to be critical. A journalism professor asked on Weibo why the official Henan television station had not pre-empted its regularly scheduled programming to report

on the unprecedented rainfall. One commenter said he must be asking on behalf of his “American master.”

A separate post by a Chinese journalist complaining about the Zhengzhou government’s lack of transparency drew so many hateful comments that she deleted it. Online critics soon migrated to her other flood-related posts, telling her to “go change your nationality quickly” and “hurry up to the United States.”

The Communist Party hasn’t always been so intolerant of criticism. Former Premier Zhu Rongji said in 1998 that it was acceptable if only 51 percent of media reporting was positive. It didn’t have to be 99 percent, he said.

In the next 15 years, investigative reporting blossomed at some semi-independent publications. One of the most prominent was the Guangzhou-based newspaper Southern Weekend, which Mr. Xi went after in early 2013 after the newsroom revolted over censorship.

In just a few years, all the newspapers, including Southern Weekend, lost their edge, becoming not much different from the party news outlets.

On Wednesday, the main article on the paper’s website was a collection of quotes from Mr. Xi’s speech this month commemorating the 100th anniversary of the founding of the Chinese Communist Party.

The headline on the most popular article, though, asked why, despite multiple early warnings of heavy rains, the Zhengzhou government had failed to close businesses and schools.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2021/07/28/business/china-floods-foreign-media.html>

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MARINE CORPS:

19. See F-35B Jets Take Off At Sea For Australian Exercise Talisman Sabre

(DEFENSE NEWS 28 JUL 21) ... Mike Yeo

MELBOURNE, Australia — U.S. Marine Corps F-35B jets are carrying out high-end integrated air warfare training with Australian counterparts in the skies above the country and the Coral Sea, as both nations hold a massive multidomain exercise.

The F-35Bs have not previously participated in the exercise Talisman Sabre, which is held once every two years. This year’s exercise saw Canada, Japan and South Korea each send a ship to participate, while Japan and the United Kingdom each sent a small contingent of ground troops, joining forces from Australia, New Zealand and the United States.

Defense News took part in a virtual media roundtable with senior U.S. Navy and Marine Corps leaders taking part in the exercise onboard the helicopter assault ship America on Wednesday, during which they provided details on the drills.

The air combat element onboard the America included F-35B short-takeoff-and-vertical-landing jets from Japan-based Marine Fighter Attack Squadron 121, which operated alongside the Bell-Boeing MV-22 Osprey tilt rotors and helicopters of Marine Medium Tiltrotor Squadron 265.

According to Rear Adm. Chris Engdahl, who commands the U.S. Navy's Expeditionary Strike Group 7, the ability of the F-35B to integrate with the Royal Australian Air Force F-35A and other assets, such as Boeing E-7A Wedgetail airborne early warning and control aircraft, during high-end air combat training "has just been spectacular."

Echoing those sentiments, the commander of the 31st Marine Expeditionary Unit, Col. Michael Nakonieczny, called the F-35Bs "fantastic and versatile," although the commanders declined to go into specifics about what missions the F-35Bs undertook or if they trained for expeditionary advanced base operations. Engdahl would only say on the topic that the Marines will exercise "every capability the Marine Corps team has" at Talisman Sabre.

Expeditionary advanced base operations allow forces to operate from advanced austere bases, and is one of the key concepts to the Corps' plan to operate in a distributed manner across vast distances — an important requirement in the Indo-Pacific region.

Australia has a number of "bare bases" in the north — a vast territory hosting bunkers and aircraft shelters with the ability to support aircraft operations at short notice. Those structures are normally manned by a handful of caretakers, with one of these, RAAF Base Scherger near Weipa, activated for the exercise for the forward deployment of Australian aircraft.

The naval ship America also did not previously participate in Talisman Sabre drills, with prior versions involving Wasp-class landing helicopter docks as the so-called big deck supporting the amphibious phase of the exercise.

The America arrived in Japan in 2019, replacing the amphibious assault ship Wasp as the forward-deployed big deck in the Indo-Pacific region. The America class differs from the Wasp class in that the former has no well dock for the berthing and operations of landing craft, and instead has expanded aviation facilities to support a larger number of aircraft.

The commodore of Amphibious Squadron 11, Capt. Greg Baker, told reporters at the roundtable that the lack of a well dock onboard the America was "a blessing and a curse," adding that the ship's capabilities provided an opportunity to learn how to operate with lower surface lift capacity but increased air capacity.

Agreeing, Engdahl said the class of ship brings a wide variety of additional options.

"We can do so much more: more dynamic lift, more movement and envelopment with this platform," Engdahl said, with the ability of the helicopters and tilt rotors onboard to deliver Marines farther and faster.

<https://www.defensenews.com/training-sim/2021/07/28/see-f-35b-jets-take-off-at-sea-for-australian-exercise-talisman-sabre/>

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20. Marines Finally Getting A Realistic Force-On-Force Shooter For Combat Training

(MARINE CORPS TIMES 28 JUL 21) ... Todd South

Within two years, Marines could finally see realistic shooting and effects when they go head to head with other services, allies or Marines in force-on-force training.

Marine Corps Systems Command recently announced a contract award to Saab Inc. for the service's Force-on-Force Training Systems-Next program.

The FoFTS-Next system will allow Marines to move away from decades of semi-accurate laser weapons systems that can often be defeated by standing behind a leafy shrub and cannot replicate the trajectories, drops, shooting experience or effects on target that are desperately needed for live training.

The Corps currently plans to buy 16 sets of the system and field them between 2023 and 2026 at all major bases, including Camp Pendleton, California; Camp Lejeune, North Carolina; Marine Corps Base Quantico, Virginia; Japan and Guam.

But the first set is likely headed for the centerpiece of Marine Corps ground combat training: Marine Corps Air Ground Combat Center, Twentynine Palms, California.

Each of those individual sets should be able to handle an entirely kitted-up battalion. While early use will focus on the platoon and company level, the system will have the capacity for an entire battalion.

Current software focuses on service weapons already at hand, but developers can build in ways to simulate future systems, such as the Next Generation Combat Weapon and even support items such as mortars, loitering munitions, artillery, grenades and more.

The new system will also allow for real-world style target leading and weapons will show trajectory drop and other characteristics of shooting actual bullets.

“I think this is going to revolutionize the way we conduct force on force training,” Col. Luis Lara, program manager for Marine Corps Systems Command training systems, told Marine Corps Times.

For decades, Marines and soldiers used the multiple integrated laser engagement system, or MILES. While cutting edge for its time, it was developed in the late 1970s. It did not have as accurate shooting or realistic factors that are essential for training good shooting and maneuver tactics and habits.

Upgrades included the instrumented tactical engagement simulation system, or ITESS. While more accurate, ITESS still fell short of Marine goals for fidelity to real-world scenarios.

Even something as simple as speed mattered. Lasers fired from ITESS or MILES instantaneously struck targets. There’s a short, but very important, lag time when shooting a real firearm.

An added feature for the FoFTS-Next is a haptic wristwatch that will monitor if direct or indirect fire is coming toward the user, Lara said.

From a command and control perspective, the FoFTS-Next will also allow commanders and observers a clear view of what their Marines are doing.

In tests, the system could track the muzzle direction of Marines moving up floors of a building in an urban training site.

The system records, allowing for after-action reviews that units can take home with them from a training location to improve performance, Lara said.

And Marines quickly realize that this system is different, Lara said.

He shared an example of a platoon of Marines testing the system at Aberdeen Proving Ground, Maryland.

That platoon had a fire team in a building trying to cross a danger area. With the old MILES or ITESS system, they knew the range and effectiveness of what they faced and crossed when they shouldn’t have.

“Within five minutes, 75 percent of the platoon was dead,” Lara said. “They had to regroup and try again. It caused them to say, ‘no kidding,’ we’re going to have to do this the right way.”

The Army is currently developing the integrated visual augmentation system, or IVAS, a do-it-all goggle that allows

users to display multiple feeds of information and also use rapid target acquisition software that wirelessly links with a camera on their weapon.

That linkup allows users to see multiple views, picture in picture with the weapon's sight, full view like a standard night vision goggle and weapon's site view such as looking through an optic.

The colonel said that the Marines are closely aligned with the Army's IVAS work and see this system as complementary for training purposes, allowing shooters to connect the two at some point in future scenarios and development.

Lara said that Marines have been experimenting with and testing the system at multiple events over the past year. Those included a platoon-sized element from The Basic School, out of Quantico.

A separate event from August to September 2020 worked with 2nd Battalion, 2nd Marine Regiment, and 3rd Battalion, 6th Marine Regiment, out of Camp Lejeune, North Carolina, each of which provided an infantry company for force-on-force work.

The experiments originally were scheduled to begin in March 2020, but were delayed due to the global COVID-19 pandemic, Lara said.

The next steps include a potential contract award for a "live, virtual, constructed" environment that could bridge simulations like virtual reality, with the force-on-force trainer. That contract could be awarded by the end of 2021.

<https://www.marinecorpstimes.com/news/your-marine-corps/2021/07/27/marines-finally-getting-a-realistic-force-on-force-shooter-for-combat-training/>

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SECURITY ENVIRONMENT:

21. Iran's Top Leader Dims Hopes For Resuming Talks On Nuclear Accord

"Trust in the West does not work," Ayatollah Ali Khamenei said, signaling further problems with stalled negotiations to salvage the country's nuclear agreement.

(NEW YORK TIMES 29 JUL 21) ... Rick Gladstone

Iran's top leader injected new doubts Wednesday into the stalled effort to save the country's 2015 nuclear pact with major powers, accusing the United States of duplicity and chastising the outgoing Iranian president as naïve.

The remarks by the leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, come one week before President Hassan Rouhani — an architect of the original nuclear accord — will step down after eight years.

The fate of Iran's negotiations with the United States to revive the accord, which have been suspended for more than a month, now falls to Mr. Rouhani's successor, Ebrahim Raisi, an arch-conservative disciple of Mr. Khamenei who takes office in a week.

The tone and timing of Mr. Khamenei's remarks, which he delivered in person to Mr. Rouhani and his cabinet in a meeting reported on Iranian state media, amounted to a public rebuke of the departing president. The remarks also

sent a message that the negotiations are likely to face further challenges under Mr. Raisi.

“A very important experience in this period that the future generations should use is distrust of the West,” Mr. Khamenei said in lecturing the outgoing president and his aides, according to an account reported by Iran’s Fars News Agency.

“In this government, it became clear that trust in the West does not work and they do not help, and they strike a blow wherever they can, and if they do not strike somewhere, it is because they cannot,” Mr. Khamenei said.

The 2015 nuclear deal with major powers including the United States granted Iran relief from onerous economic sanctions in exchange for verifiable pledges to severely restrict its nuclear work and vastly reduce its stockpile of uranium, which can be used to make bomb fuel.

President Donald J. Trump repudiated the deal in 2018, calling it insufficiently strict and reimposing American sanctions that have hobbled Iran’s economy in what he called a “maximum pressure” campaign. Iran has since suspended compliance with the accord’s key provisions.

While Iran has insisted its nuclear ambitions remain purely peaceful, nonproliferation experts say the country is now much closer to bomb-making capability than it was under the agreement.

Talks aimed at saving the agreement from collapse began under the Biden administration. Early hopes for a restoration quickly faded, with Iran demanding the United States first rescind the sanctions and guarantee it would never repudiate the agreement again.

Mr. Biden’s negotiators have said Iran must return to full compliance with the agreement and be prepared for further negotiations aimed at limiting Iranian missile development and support for militant groups in the Middle East. American officials have also ruled out the guarantee demanded by Iran.

Both sides said progress was made but they appeared to remain far apart when the talks, held through intermediaries in Vienna, were suspended in June.

Mr. Khamenei, who as Iran’s top leader has the final word on national security issues, said the United States was responsible for the impasse in reviving the agreement, which is known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action.

“In these talks, the Americans stood firm on their stubborn position and did not take a single step forward,” he said.

The State Department rejected Mr. Khamenei’s assertions, saying the Biden administration has been “sincere and steadfast to achieve a mutual return to compliance.”

“We have made clear that we are prepared to return to Vienna to resume negotiations,” the department said in an emailed statement. “The same could not be said of Iran. No amount of deflection can obscure that.”

Signs of trouble in the talks have started to emerge among the countries that were part of the original agreement — Britain, China, France, Germany and Russia. They have played a prominent role as intermediaries.

Earlier this week, a spokeswoman for France’s Foreign Ministry, Agnès von der Mühl, laid the responsibility on Iran.

“If it continues on this path, not only will it continue to delay when an agreement to lift sanctions can be reached, but it risks jeopardizing the very possibility of concluding the Vienna talks and restoring the J.C.P.O.A.,” she told reporters.

Analysts who have followed the history of the nuclear agreement noted that Mr. Khamenei, in his remarks on Wednesday, did not terminate the talks, which they regarded as a sign he still wanted them to succeed — and that he wanted his protégé, Mr. Raisi, to get any political credit for such an achievement.

“He hasn’t hesitated to ban such engagements in the past when he feels that negotiations are pointless or damaging,”

said Henry Rome, a Middle East expert at the Eurasia Group, a political risk consultancy.

But the message of Mr. Khamenei's remarks, Mr. Rome said, "really underscores the point that getting back into the deal was never going to be easy or immediate."

<https://www.nytimes.com/2021/07/28/world/middleeast/khamenei-iran-nuclear-talks.html>

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22. U.S. Sanctions Syrians Linked to Alleged Atrocities

Action is a public censure of the Assad regime and its supporters including Russia and Iran, analysts say, given the targeted officials' limited exposure

(WALL STREET JOURNAL 28 JUL 21) ... Ian Talley

WASHINGTON—The U.S. Treasury Department levied sanctions against five senior Syrian security officials and eight prisons accused of committing human-rights abuses, the start of what the Biden administration says will be its campaign to hold the Assad regime accountable for war crimes.

Wednesday's action targets intelligence officials the U.S. says are involved in the kidnapping, killing and torture of Syrians opposed to the regime in a decadelong civil war that has claimed hundreds of thousands of lives.

The Treasury Department also sanctioned Syrian opposition militia Ahrar al-Sharqiya and two of its leaders for alleged abductions, torture and killings, including that of a top Kurdish politician that United Nations officials said was a possible war crime.

Syria's mission to the U.N. didn't immediately respond to a request for comment.

Andrea Gacki, director of Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control, said the sanctions are meant to promote accountability and demonstrate the U.S.'s "strong commitment to targeting human-rights abuses in Syria, regardless of the perpetrator."

The sanctions prohibit travel to the U.S. and block any assets the officials and entities might have within U.S. jurisdiction. Given the likely limited financial exposure the officials and prisons have to the sanctions, analysts say the action is intended more as public censure of the regime and its supporters, notably Russia and Iran.

The blacklistings were levied in part under the so-called Caesar sanctions authority, named for a Syrian defector known by the pseudonym Caesar who fled the country with more than 50,000 images of atrocities that U.S. investigators said were committed by President Bashar al-Assad's government.

Some of the photos documented abuses at Saydnaya Military Prison, also blacklisted, where some nongovernmental organizations say between 5,000 to 13,000 were executed between 2011 and 2015. The U.S. says that reports from detainees smuggled out from the facility indicate the killings have accelerated since then.

The action expands the Trump administration's Caesar-sanctions program and follows a comprehensive review of U.S. sanction policies. The administration gave priority to its humanitarian outreach, issuing waivers that allowed more international aid to flow into the country, pledging \$600 million in aid for the refugee crisis and securing U.N. authorization to reopen a border crossing for deliveries.

<https://www.wsj.com/articles/u-s-sanctions-syrians-linked-to-alleged-atrocities-11627488824>

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CORONAVIRUS:

23. Two Sailors Die from COVID-19 Complications After Hospitalization

(USNI NEWS 28 JUL 21) ... Sam LaGrone

An active-duty Navy doctor in North Carolina and a reserve sailor in Idaho died this week from complications from COVID-19, the Navy announced on Wednesday.

Capt. Corby Ropp, 48, died on July 23 at Duke University Hospital in Durham, N.C., following complications from a COVID-19 infection, according to a statement from the Navy Bureau of Medicine and Surgery.

Master-at-Arms First Class Allen Hillman, 47, died on July 26 in Boise, Idaho, after being hospitalized for complications from COVID, according to a statement from the Navy Reserve Force.

Ropp is the 7th active-duty sailor to die from complications related to COVID-19 and Hillman is the third reservist, according to USNI News reports of Navy deaths related to the virus.

The service would not confirm their COVID-19 vaccination status when asked by USNI News, citing medical privacy laws. However, a Navy official told USNI News on Wednesday both Ropp and Hillman were not vaccinated for COVID-19.

Ropp was assigned to Navy Medicine Readiness and Training Command (NMRTC) Camp Lejeune, N.C., as the department head of ophthalmology and refractive surgery, according to the service.

He was commissioned in 1997 via ROTC from the University of Colorado, Boulder and served in Texas, California and Florida before coming to Camp Lejeune.

Hillman, a former Marine, enlisted in the Navy Reserve in 2003 and served largely in recruiting commands in Oregon and Idaho. As a civilian, he worked as a deputy at the Ada County Sheriff's Office from 1996 to 2019.

The new deaths come as the Delta variant of the virus has surged throughout the U.S. The increase in infections prompted the Defense Department to issue new masking guidance on Wednesday and prompted the head of Navy medicine to issue warnings to the fleet on the spread of the new variant.

To date, ten sailors have died from COVID-19 complications since the start of the pandemic.

On April 29, Senior Chief Fire Controlman Michael Wilson, 45, died at Riverside Regional Medical Center in Newport News, Va., He had been on a short-term assignment at the Information Warfare Training Command in Virginia Beach.

Chief Hull Technician Justin Huf, 39, died Feb. 22 at the Sentara Leigh Hospital's intensive care unit in Norfolk, Va. He was assigned to Assault Craft Unit (ACU) 4.

Aviation Support Equipment Technician 1st Class Marcglenn Orcullo, 42, who was part of the crew of USS Wasp (LHD-1), died in a hospital in Norfolk, Va., on Feb. 12 from complications connected to COVID-19.

Information Systems Technician (Submarines) Second Class Petty Officer Cody Andrew-Godfredson Myers, 26, died from the coronavirus on Feb. 4 in the University of Florida Health Shands Hospital's intensive care unit. Myers was part of Ohio-class submarine USS Tennessee's (SSBN-734) Blue Crew.

Two days before Myers' death, Navy boot camp instructor Chief Quartermaster Herbert Rojas, 50, died of COVID-19 while quarantining at home.

Following the outbreak aboard aircraft carrier USS Theodore Roosevelt (CVN-71) in the early days of the pandemic, Chief Petty Officer Charles Robert Thacker Jr., 41, died in Guam in April 2020.

Two other reservists have also died from the virus. Logistics Specialist 2nd Class Abdigafar Salad Warsame, 52, died from COVID-19 in January. Builder 2nd Class Nathan Huff Bishop, 33, died in December. Bishop was assigned to Navy Operational Support Center (NOSC) Akron, Ohio, while Warsame had been assigned to NOSC Columbus, Ohio.

<https://news.usni.org/2021/07/28/two-sailors-die-from-covid-19-complications-after-hospitalization>

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24. DoD Making Masks Mandatory Again, Even for the Vaccinated, in Some Places

(MILITARY.COM 28 JUL 21) ... Stephen Losey

The Defense Department on Wednesday resumed requiring all people – including those who have been fully vaccinated against COVID-19 – to wear masks indoors at military facilities in places where the disease is spreading quickly.

Deputy Defense Secretary Kathleen Hicks said in a memo that, effective immediately, all service members, federal employees, on-site contractors and visitors must wear masks when indoors in areas of “substantial or high community transmission” of COVID-19, as defined by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

This applies to everybody, regardless of vaccination status, Hicks said. Those who are not fully vaccinated must keep physically distancing themselves from others, she said.

According to CDC guidelines, areas with substantial transmission levels are where there have been 50 to 99.99 new cases per 100,000 persons in the last seven days, and high transmission levels are where there are 100 new cases per 100,000 or more in the previous week. Data on community transmission levels can be found at the CDC's COVID Data Tracker website.

For example, Bexar County, Texas, where Joint Base San Antonio is located, now has a high level of community transmission, as do places like Bossier Parish, Louisiana, home of Barksdale Air Force Base, and Clark County, Nevada, home of Nellis Air Force Base.

Hicks said that people entering defense installations, workspaces or other facilities who do not have a mask may be provided one at the installation.

The Defense Department in May began allowing fully vaccinated people to no longer wear masks, whether indoors or outdoors.

But the military's move today to tighten mask rules comes as concerns are growing about plateauing vaccination rates and the spread of a highly contagious Delta variant of COVID-19. On Tuesday, the CDC recommended even fully vaccinated people wear masks in public indoor settings in areas of substantial or high transmission.

The Navy also announced Wednesday that two more sailors had died of complications from COVID in the last week.

California is preparing to require its National Guardsmen to get the COVID vaccine by early next month, or be required to undergo regular testing.

The Department of Veterans Affairs on Monday ordered the majority of its health-care workers to get vaccinated.

And the Washington Post and CNN reported that President Joe Biden is preparing to announce Thursday a requirement for all federal employees and contractors to get vaccinated or have to be tested regularly.

But while the military is looking at the possibility of requiring troops to receive the vaccine, it cannot legally do so until the Food and Drug Administration issues its final approval for the drugs. The COVID vaccines are now approved under an emergency use authorization.

The FDA has been reviewing the Pfizer and BioNTech vaccine since early May, and the Moderna vaccine since early June. It is not yet certain when it will grant them full approval.

<https://www.military.com/daily-news/2021/07/28/dod-making-masks-mandatory-again-even-vaccinated-some-places.html>

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25. Biden to Require Covid Vaccine or Regular Testing for Federal Employees

The announcement, expected on Thursday, is also set to include social distancing, masking and restrictions on travel for the unvaccinated

(NEW YORK TIMES 29 JUL 21) ... Michael D. Shear

WASHINGTON -- President Biden will formally announce on Thursday that all civilian federal employees must be vaccinated against the coronavirus or be forced to submit to regular testing, social distancing, mask requirements and restrictions on most travel, two people familiar with the president's plans said on Wednesday.

White House officials said the administration was still reviewing details of the policy, which the president is expected to announce in a speech from the White House. In a statement on Tuesday, Mr. Biden said his remarks would reveal "the next steps in our effort to get more Americans vaccinated."

The president's move is expected to be similar to an announcement on Wednesday by Gov. Andrew M. Cuomo of New York, who said tens of thousands of state employees would be required to show proof of vaccination or submit to weekly testing. Mr. Cuomo also said that "patient facing" health care workers at state-run hospitals would be required to be vaccinated as a condition of their employment.

Other governments around the country are beginning to put in place similar arrangements as well, as the highly

contagious Delta variant has caused cases to balloon in recent weeks. New York City announced this week that it would require all 300,000 city employees to be vaccinated or submit to weekly testing. California also unveiled a plan to require vaccinations for state employees.

The federal plan is not expected to force employees to get a shot unless they work directly with patients at hospitals run by the Veterans Affairs Department. But public health officials are hoping that the prospect of extra burdens for the unvaccinated will help persuade more people to get one.

People familiar with Mr. Biden's announcement said it was part of a longstanding discussion about how to bring most federal workers back to the office after nearly a year and a half in which hundreds of thousands of them worked from home because of the pandemic.

A team from a series of agencies has been working on that plan for months, trying to juggle the concerns of employees and the need to keep the government functioning. One concern that officials confronted was how to require vaccinations without potentially prompting critical employees to quit, undermining the government's mission.

But the president's announcement comes as the administration is under pressure to increase the rate of vaccinations in the country. About half of all Americans have been fully vaccinated, but the number of people getting shots has slowed significantly from the early months of the year.

Karine Jean-Pierre, the deputy White House press secretary, declined on Wednesday to provide details of the president's speech, but said the general approach was to give employees a choice that would hopefully encourage them to get vaccinated.

The plan, she told reporters, is aimed at "confirming vaccination status or abiding by stringent Covid-19 protocols, like mandatory mask wearing, even in communities not with high or subsequent substantial spread, and regular testing."

White House officials left open the possibility that some parts of the federal government might follow the lead of the Veterans Affairs Department and go further. That could include requiring employees who are in critical positions or deal directly with vulnerable populations to be vaccinated if they want to keep their job.

"We've also said requirements for vaccination may be under consideration for certain entities within the government," Ms. Jean-Pierre said.

Mr. Biden's decision to embrace stricter vaccine rules for federal workers follows days of deliberations and reflects the growing concern among top federal health officials about the Delta variant.

Those concerns prompted the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to revise its recommendations for mask wearing this week, telling Americans that they should wear face coverings indoors in areas of the country where the spread of the virus is significant.

On Wednesday, officials at the Defense Department issued a statement saying that all military employees in those parts of the country should wear masks in all department facilities. That included the Pentagon just outside Washington, which is set to begin requiring people inside the building to wear a mask.

"Today's announcement applies to all service members, federal personnel, contractors and visitors when indoors at all properties owned by the department in those areas, in accordance with updated C.D.C. guidelines," said Jamal Brown, a deputy Pentagon press secretary.

But officials have said the best way to avoid getting sick from the virus is to be vaccinated. Recent research has shown vaccines remain effective against the worst outcomes of Covid-19, including those involving the Delta variant.

Defense Secretary Lloyd J. Austin III has indicated that he will wait to require the vaccine for all members of the military until the Food and Drug Administration has given final approval for the shots, which are currently being

administered under an emergency use authorization. Mr. Biden could overrule Mr. Austin, but officials said he was unlikely to do that.

Asked by a reporter on Tuesday whether he would require vaccinations for the nation's nearly two million federal workers, Mr. Biden was blunt.

"That's under consideration right now," he said. "But if you're not vaccinated, you're not nearly as smart as I thought you were."

<https://www.nytimes.com/2021/07/28/us/politics/biden-federal-workers-vaccination.html>

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DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE:

26. Austin Calls For 'Responsible' Space Operations

(WASHINGTON TIMES 28 JUL 21) ... Bill Gertz

Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin earlier this month outlined key elements of "responsible behavior in space" in a memorandum to senior Pentagon and military leaders.

"As more actors come to space, the domain is changing, with an increased risk of collisions, as well as of miscalculations or misunderstandings," Mr. Austin said in the July 7 memo. "It is incumbent on the department to continue space leadership through demonstrating and acknowledging responsible behavior in space."

The memo directed all Pentagon and military agencies to conduct space operations in line with "tenets of responsible behavior."

Space forces will operate in, from, to and through space with "regard for others" along with "a professional manner." Activities also will limit producing orbiting trash that is long-lived. Space assets also must avoid the "creation of harmful interference, and maintain safe separation and safe trajectories for satellites and spacecraft."

Communications and notifications also need to be carried out in ways that enhance the stability and safety of space.

The head of the new U.S. Space Command "will collaborate with DoD stakeholders to develop and coordinate guidance regarding these tenets and associated specific behaviors for DoD operations in the space area of responsibility, and recommend them to the secretary of defense for approval," Mr. Austin stated.

Newly installed Undersecretary of Defense for Policy Colin Kahl will head up space behavior tenets throughout government and internationally, the memo states.

The new policy appears to be an attempt by the Biden administration to promote international norms for space activities, said Michael Listner, a space expert. Mr. Listner said that while the directive is meant to be internal guidance, the tenets could create positive geopolitical optics and push back against pressure for new and restrictive treaties for space.

"Caution needs to be taken, considering 'norms' is usually a feint for customary international law, which [nongovernmental organizations] will latch on to in an attempt to drive the conversation," said Mr. Listner, founder

of Space Law & Policy Solutions, a think tank.

The Austin memo also appears to be adopting the soft-deterrence approach contained in the 2011 National Security Space Strategy, one that seeks to encourage China and Russia not to use anti-satellite weapons.

“But the memo apparently takes into consideration lawfare tactics in its ‘all bets are off’ contingency in the event an adversary decides to ignore the rules or launch a preemptive ASAT strike,” Mr. Listner said.

The 2011 space strategy, signed by Defense Secretary Robert Gates and Director of National Intelligence James Clapper, states that defense policy aims to promote the responsible, peaceful and safe use of space. However, the strategy also acknowledges that war in space is possible.

“Our military and intelligence capabilities must be prepared to ‘fight through’ a degraded environment and defeat attacks targeted at our space systems and supporting infrastructure,” the report states. “We must deny and defeat an adversary’s ability to achieve its objectives.”

China was criticized for the irresponsible use of space warfare capabilities in conducting a 2007 anti-satellite missile test in space that left tens of thousands of pieces of debris orbiting Earth and threatening manned and unmanned spacecraft for decades. The test involved a direct-ascent anti-satellite missile that blew up a Chinese weather satellite.

The Austin memorandum was signed around the same time that Rear Adm. Michael Bernacchi, Space Command’s director of strategy, plans and policy, warned that China is engaged in a large-scale, rapid buildup of space warfare capabilities. Adm. Bernacchi said the speed of the deployment of anti-satellite missiles, electronic jammers and robot satellite killers is scary.

“The thing that scares me the most: If you go back six years ago, China had almost nothing,” he said. “Now you look at them, and the ability for China to exponentially grow their counter-space capability is scary. I mean, I don’t know how else to put it.”

U.S. military satellites are viewed by adversaries as the Achilles’ heel of American joint warfare capabilities.

Military forces are heavily reliant on satellites for communications, navigation and weapons targeting. Knocking out even a few satellites could cripple operations.

Senators Seek Deeper Covid Origin Probe

A bipartisan group of senators this week urged President Biden to order U.S. intelligence agencies to more vigorously pursue the investigation into the origin of the COVID-19 pandemic.

“The threat to international health and security posed by the Chinese Communist Party’s repressive and opaque governance of the People’s Republic of China has become glaringly apparent over the past eighteen months, particularly given the PRC’s efforts to conceal the severity and scope of the outbreak of the SARS-CoV-2 virus that caused the COVID-19 -19 pandemic,” the senators stated in a July 27 letter to the president.

“The PRC’s refusal to cooperate with the World Health Organization investigation into COVID-19 origins, the gag order it imposed on Chinese scientists and medical personnel, and its ongoing obfuscation and disinformation campaign regarding the pandemic have caused severe hardship worldwide.”

The letter was signed by Democratic Sens. Robert Menendez and Mark R. Warner, chairmen of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee and Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, respectively, and Sens. James E. Risch and Marco Rubio, vice chairman and ranking Republican members of those panels. The senators noted the May directive by the White House ordering U.S. intelligence agencies to seek a “definitive conclusion” regarding the pandemic origin.

To prevent another deadly and damaging pandemic, the senators asked Mr. Biden to ensure that spy agencies zero in on where the virus originated and how it first spread.

“If the 90-day effort you have announced does not yield conclusions in which the United States has a high degree of confidence, we urge you to direct the intelligence community to continue prioritizing this inquiry until such conclusions are possible,” they stated.

Intelligence agencies also need to examine virus research conducted at the Wuhan Institute of Virology (WIV), where the coronavirus may have escaped, as well as the Wuhan Center for Disease Prevention and Control and the Wuhan Institute of Biological Products.

“This investigation must evaluate evidence regarding WIV researchers who fell ill in the fall of 2019,” the senators stated. “It should identify other details of any researchers at the WIV who were working on coronavirus projects, and attempts by the PRC government to silence or disappear them; details of any WIV gain-of-function research specific to coronaviruses or other potential human pathogens; laboratory safety standards and practices for such research; and details of any research in synthetic biology and biotechnology connected to the ‘Military-Civil Fusion’ strategy, and other military work or funding at the WIV.”

Investigation of the spread of the virus from animals to humans also is needed, including specific zoonotic transmission chains, and the most likely timing, location and contributing factors related to any animal-to-human spillover events.

China’s efforts to block an international investigation into the virus origin and other actions taken by Beijing to obscure the nature of the virus and its transmission also should be part of the intelligence inquiry. The inquiry should include whether China’s government violated international agreements related to the handling of the virus outbreak and, if there are indications of a cover-up, the agencies should “analyze its motivations for doing so.”

Additionally, the senators want the U.S. government to lead an international forensic investigation inside China.

“In light of the PRC’s continued stonewalling of WHO efforts, the U.S. government should work with our allies and partners to use all available resources and tools to pressure Beijing to permit a serious investigation,” they stated.

American government funding of gain-of-function virus research in China also should be part of the intelligence probe.

“U.S. taxpayer funding should not support any collaboration with PRC entities that pose health, economic or security risks for the United States,” the senators said. “The PRC has demonstrated lax biosecurity standards, violated [international health regulations], attempted to steal intellectual property related to COVID-19 vaccines, and may be in violation of the Biological Weapons Convention.”

The formal review should determine whether there were direct or indirect taxpayer funds in China and the WIV, and whether the research was used by the Chinese military.

A State Department fact sheet put out by the Trump administration on the WIV said the Chinese military had been conducting research at the institute, including experiments, since at least 2017.

WIV officials have denied conducting any military-related research or that there was any possibility the coronavirus escaped from the lab.

Gayl Under Investigation

A Marine Corps civilian who wrote an article for the Chinese Communist Party-affiliated outlet Global Times is under investigation by the Pentagon, according to a military officer.

Franz Gayl, a science adviser for the Marine Corps, also had his security clearance suspended pending the outcome of the counterintelligence probe, said the officer, who spoke on the condition of anonymity.

Mr. Gayl, in a Global Times article published April 27, warned that the United States would lose a war with China over Taiwan. Pentagon officials said the article was published without authorization.

A Marine captain familiar with details of the case said after an initial review that the Gayl investigation was extended for 90 days. The probe is expected to be completed by Sept. 30.

As reported in this space in May, two Republican House members wrote to Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin asking how the retired Marine Corps major and now civilian adviser was allowed to write for Beijing's most ardent anti-U.S. propaganda outlet.

"The fact that an administration official would so openly, brazenly and repeatedly promote [Chinese Communist Party] propaganda without repercussion is outrageous," wrote Rep. Thomas P. Tiffany, Wisconsin Republican, and Rep. Scott Perry, Pennsylvania Republican. "The fact that he remains employed is frankly, mind-boggling."

Mr. Gayl declined to comment.

He told The Washington Post that on June 1 he was informed he was the target of a counterintelligence investigation related to two articles he wrote for Global Times.

"I knew the things I was saying weren't going to get approval, but ... we are running out of time as a country," Mr. Gayl said, adding that he plans to retire.

<https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2021/jul/28/defense-secretary-lloyd-austin-calls-responsible-s/>

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27. DoD Dragged Its Feet On Toxic Chemical Exposure Prevention And Clean-Up, IG Finds

(MILITARY TIMES 27 JUL 21) ... Meghann Myers

Back in 2011, the Defense Department's Emerging Chemical Program issued a "risk alert" detailing the hazards of per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances, known collectively as PFAS, found in aqueous film-forming foam used to fight vehicle and aircraft fires. Then nothing happened.

Due to a tricky bit of bureaucracy, that risk alert had no muscle behind it, because it wasn't endorsed by the Pentagon's Emerging Chemicals of Concern Governance Council, according to an inspector general report released Friday. In short, they could put out the alert, but there was no accompanying instruction to allow them to do anything about it.

"Therefore, DoD officials were not required to plan, program, and budget for any actions in response to the 2011 risk alert," according to the IG report. "EC Program officials did not require proactive risk management actions for PFAS containing AFFF until 2016."

The report comes two years after dozens of lawmakers requested a DoD IG review of the use of PFAS on installations and exposure to those living on and around them. The IG announced the evaluation in early 2020.

DoD has been aware of the risks of PFAS for decades, including their tendency to build up in the body over time, as well as their links to cancer.

In addition to testing drinking water and installing filtering systems on installations, the military limits the use of aqueous film-forming foam to active firefighting situations. But for much of the 20th century it was also used in training, causing decades of build-up in ground water.

"This Inspector General's report confirms that the Defense Department must urgently do more to protect service members and their families from PFAS chemicals," Dan Kildee (D-Mich.), co-chair of the Congressional PFAS Task Force, said in a Tuesday release from the Environmental Working Group. "Due to the Defense Department's use of firefighting foam containing PFAS chemicals, many service members, military firefighters and their families are still at risk of exposure."

As of last fall, annual blood testing is required for DoD firefighting personnel, to monitor the levels of PFAS building up their systems.

But there are other potential sources of PFAS exposure, according to the IG report, which the Pentagon has mostly overlooked, setting back any efforts for a more enterprise-wide approach to decontamination and tracking of health outcomes.

"This occurred because DoD officials were focused on AFFF, a major source of potential PFAS exposure, and not on all sources of potential PFAS exposure caused by DoD activities," the report reads. "As a result, people and the environment may continue to be exposed to preventable risks from other PFAS containing materials."

And despite that focus on AFFF, DoD research has not yielded any candidates for replace it.

It's not just that there is so much to clean up, the deputy assistant defense secretary for environment and energy resilience said during a House Appropriations Committee hearing. It's that technology is still trying to catch up to the task.

"The rate of progress is defined primarily by the rules that govern our physical world. Physics, chemistry, science," Richard Kidd, deputy assistant defense secretary for environment and energy resilience, said during a House Appropriations Committee hearing in May. "Based on what we know today — and known technology - frankly, it will be years before we fully define the scope of the problem and with that definition can reflect it in our budget request, and after that, probably decades before cleanup is complete."

While there have been risk management requirements in place since 2016, there were no central efforts overseen by Pentagon leadership until 2019, when a PFAS Task Force stood up, charged with reviewing the depth and breadth of the risks and offering recommendations to remedy them.

To fill in the gaps, the IG recommended writing down requirements for the Emerging Chemical Program to begin risk management measures, including informing DoD personnel and neighbors of DoD installations of their potential exposures.

The acting assistant defense secretary for sustainment agreed with those recommendations, according to the report.

<https://www.militarytimes.com/news/your-military/2021/07/27/dod-dragged-its-feet-on-toxic-chemical-exposure-prevention-and-clean-up-ig-finds/>

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28. New Data Analysis Software Could Give Commanders More Time To Make Combat Decisions, NORTHCOM Commander Says

(STARS AND STRIPES 28 JUL 21) ... Caitlin Doornbos

The military is finding new ways to use technology to help commanders make better, faster decisions on the battlefield with software that brings together and analyzes information such as radar data from across the world, Air

Force Gen. Glen VanHerck, the commander of U.S. Northern Command, said Wednesday.

NORTHCOM just finished its third global information dominance experiment, which brought together all 11 U.S. combatant commands this month to practice sharing information across the world, VanHerck told reporters at the Pentagon.

Participants used software tools designed to analyze, synthesize and share information across all combatant commands to help commanders work together to make better and faster combat decisions.

Some of the tools use artificial intelligence, something that Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin recently called “one of the [Defense] department’s top tech modernization priorities.”

He said in a July 13 speech that he sees AI as key to prevent future conflicts as China — the primary “pacing threat” for the United States — increases its efforts to develop such technology.

Still, “humans still make all the decisions” in the technology used for the global information dominance experiments, VanHerck said. The AI in that software collects and digests important information from across the world on which commanders need to base their decisions.

“Certainly, machines can provide options,” VanHerck said. “For example, if you ... develop deterrence options that utilize force structure such as airplanes or ships, the data can have the information of the readiness, the availability or the capability of those ships available so any options you create, you’ll know if they’re available immediately.”

While VanHerck said the software could make a significant impact, the information being analyzed has already been available.

“It’s not new information, it’s information that today is just not analyzed and processed until later in the time cycle,” he said. “All we’re doing is taking it and sharing it and making it available sooner.”

Though the information already exists, VanHerck said using software to synthesize data allows decision-makers extra time to take preventative actions.

“All too often we end up reacting to a competitor’s move, and in this case it actually allows us to create deterrence, which creates stability by having awareness sooner,” he said.

VanHerck said he hopes to field the software “sooner than later so that we can collaborate and create decision space and deterrence options for our senior leaders right now.”

“I believe, in the near future, that we can kind of build the bike while we ride it,” he said. “We can use a new paradigm — a new way going forward — and field these capabilities across the combatant commands today and develop the tactics, techniques and procedures that oftentimes take us years to develop through developmental testing [and] operational testing.”

<https://www.stripes.com/theaters/us/2021-07-28/artificial-intelligence-northcom-vanherck-combatant-commands-2345655.html>

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EXECUTIVE/LEGISLATIVE:

29. HASC Readiness Mark Wants to Save INSURV Reports; TACAIR Panel Cautious of Navy's Strike Fighter Plans

(USNI NEWS 28 JUL 21) ... Mallory Shelbourne

The House Armed Services Committee readiness subcommittee wants to make sure the independent report on the health of the Navy's fleet continues in perpetuity.

The panel's mark of the Fiscal Year 2022 defense policy bill, released on Wednesday, includes language mandating the Navy "make permanent the requirement for an annual report to the congressional defense committees on the material readiness of Navy ships."

The provision's inclusion in the mark comes after HASC readiness subcommittee chairman Rep. John Garamendi (D-Calif.) and HASC seapower and projection forces subcommittee ranking member Rep. Rob Wittman (R-Va.) unveiled legislation earlier this year meant to save the Board of Inspection and Survey (INSURV) reports, which under previous legislation would no longer be mandated after Oct. 1, 2021.

Like Garamendi and Wittman's proposed legislation, the provision in the policy bill mark mandates both a classified report for lawmakers and an unclassified version for the public.

If passed, the provision would eradicate language in the FY 2019 National Defense Authorization Act, which said a report would no longer be mandated after Oct. 1, 2021. USNI News reported earlier this year that the long-standing INSURV reports were slated to end later this year without Congressional action.

Meanwhile, the HASC tactical air and land forces subcommittee also released its mark of the FY 2022 policy bill today. While the subcommittee did not disclose details about funding, a committee aide expressed doubt about the Navy's approach to ending its F/A-18E/F Super Hornet production line so it could pursue the new Next Generation Air Dominance (NGAD) program. In a briefing with reporters today, the aide noted the Navy unsuccessfully took a similar approach in the recent past.

"In terms of NGAD, yeah, we're aware that the Navy wants to focus more resources and funding on NGAD. But if you recall, about eight or 10 years ago they tried to do the same thing when F-35C was in development in that they wanted to – you know, they truncated their Super Hornet line to focus more on F-35C. As they found out, as F-35C kind of struggled, the Navy had to go back to procuring more Super Hornets," the aide told reporters.

"We're cautious about the Navy's approach to truncate a hot production line while they focus on a new development program. And given the technology that they're trying to integrate into NGAD, it's probably not going to be any easier than what F-35C was," the aide added. "So, just you know, taking lessons learned from the past, we're just keeping an eye with how the Navy's going to move forward with trying to manage and mitigate their strike fighter shortfall."

The Navy was slated to purchase more Super Hornets in a multi-year procurement from FY 2022 to FY 2024, but in the FY 2021 budget submission the service disclosed plans to cut the buy and instead put the money toward NGAD, "and other key aviation wholeness investments."

The aide also noted that the Navy is not achieving its cost and schedule for the Service Life Modification effort for the Super Hornets and said the chairman's mark would speak to any decisions that could alter the Navy's plans for the fourth-generation aircraft.

"Anything we might do to change the trajectory would be addressed in the full committee mark. As it relates to the Navy's plans to truncate Super Hornet procurement to focus on SLM – their service life modification program for their existing Hornets as well as NGAD – if you look at the current execution of their SLM line, they can't meet their cost or schedule that they're planning to," the aide said.

“They’re trying to put through Hornets within a year timeframe that’ll cost them about \$7 to 8 million. Right now, the timeframe is nearly double that, as well as the cost,” the aide added. “And so basically the Navy is not executing their SLM program as they [are] currently planning for in the future, which is to meet that cost and schedule that I just discussed.”

Rear Adm. Andrew Loiselle, who leads the chief of naval operation’s air warfare directorate (OPNAV N98), recently told Congress that the Navy will alleviate its strike fighter shortfall by 2025 by changing how it fields the F-35C in the air wing. The service is now planning to have one squadron, made up of 14 aircraft, per air wing.

During the call, the aide voiced confusion about the Navy’s calculations on the shortfall and noted the recent budget submission does not include the five-year budget outlook known as the Future Years Defense Program (FYDP).

“As it relates to the strike fighter shortfall itself, yeah, we are kind of you know scratching our heads on how the Navy moved up their analysis in terms of eliminating their shortfall by about five years. One, they didn’t reinstate the 36-aircraft Super Hornets that they were going to procure in ’22, ’23, ’24. They also took out about 104 aircraft out of their service life modification program,” the aide said. “The NGAD program – the Next-Gen Air Dominance – is pretty much on the same timeline that it was last year.”

“And everything they do is out of the FYDP. You know and with us not being able to see their FYDP numbers, we’re kind of skeptical to understand how the Navy manipulated the data and their analysis to bring the shortfall to resolve in five years earlier in 2025,” the aide added.

The subcommittee’s mark calls for the head of the Government Accountability Office to present lawmakers with a report by April 1, 2022 on tactical aviation for the Navy, Air Force and Marine Corps and the services’ shortfalls.

“In addition, the report should assess the extent to which the services’ tactical aircraft acquisition and modernization investment plans, including NGAD efforts, are likely to meet those requirements and address the shortfalls. Finally, the Comptroller General should, as appropriate, provide the congressional defense committees with periodic briefings on preliminary findings and pertinent information during the compilation and drafting of the final report,” the tactical air and land forces subcommittee mark reads.

Asked about adding more F-35Cs, which the Senate Armed Services Committee did in its mark of the FY 2022 policy bill, the aide said the full committee mark would address the matter.

“Chairman Smith, Chairman Garamendi, Chairman Norcross have been publicly vocal about their concerns with the F-35 program and adding more aircraft and you know, the issues that may have contributed to the sustainment enterprise being a little bit – you know, not being able to perform like that have. Anything that we do ... would be addressed in the full committee mark as it relates to funding,” the aide said, referring to HASC chairman Rep. Adam Smith (D-Wash.) and HASC tactical air and land forces chairman Rep. Donald Norcross (D-N.J.).

Both subcommittees are slated to mark up their respective drafts on Thursday.

<https://news.usni.org/2021/07/28/hasc-readiness-mark-wants-to-save-insurv-reports-tacair-panel-cautious-of-navys-strike-fighter-plans>

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30. Sea Power Panel Backs Block Buy Of Amphibious Ships

(DEFENSE NEWS 28 JUL 21) ... Joe Gould

WASHINGTON - A House panel on Wednesday advanced a proposal to authorize the Navy to make a block buy of amphibious ships for one more year, meant to save taxpayer dollars, proponents say.

The House Armed Services Committee's sea power subpanel voted to adopt the plans, part of an amendment from its top Republican, Rep. Rob Wittman of Virginia. As expected, lawmakers also advanced the broader sea power mark for the sweeping fiscal 2022 National Defense Authorization Act.

If passed into law, Wittman's language would extend authorities from the FY21 NDAA related to a bundled contract for the amphibious assault ship LHA-9 and amphibious transport docks 31, 32 and 33.

"This is all about the amphibious ship bundle, to make sure that [the Office of the Secretary of Defense] continues the effort to purchase these ships," Wittman said. "We know there's been a delay by [the Cost Assessment and Program Evaluation office], but I believe it's incredibly important for this nation to make sure that we exercise the savings, which would be nearly a billion dollars, in buying four ships under this authorization to purchase amphibious ships in this bundle."

The action follows Mississippi Republican Sen. Roger Wicker's efforts to pressure the Pentagon into following through with a congressionally mandated rule to buy four amphibious ships in a single "block buy." Politico reported last month that Wicker, whose state is home to Ingalls Shipbuilding in Pascagoula, which builds Navy destroyers and amphibious ships, has slowed CAPE nominee Susanna Blume in an attempt to push the Navy in that direction.

The sea power markup also included language to recommend a second Arleigh Burke-class destroyer widely sought by lawmakers, and it cuts one of two towing, salvage and rescue ships. Without the second destroyer, the Navy cannot meet its obligation under multiyear contracts with both Ingalls Shipbuilding and General Dynamics' Bath Iron Works.

"The Arleigh Burke class of destroyers have proven to be one of our most capable and flexible surface combatants," said Connecticut Democrat Rep. Joe Courtney, the subpanel chairman. "While I am frustrated that this is the second year that Congress has had to act to restore a major unfunded priority that was unexpectedly removed from the budget, doing so is the right decision for our fleet and for the industrial base."

Meanwhile, the Air Force had hoped to draw down its number of C-130 aircraft from 300 to 255 in FY22. But the sea power markup mandates a fleet of no less than 287 C-130H aircraft - just after Senate lawmakers advanced their bill, with a floor of 292 C-130s.

At the markup, Wittman lauded the bill Courtney offered but signaled he would push to add ships when HASC debates the forthcoming chairman's markup. Wittman argued that deterring future conflict with China requires adopting the Trump administration's goal of rapidly expanding naval shipbuilding.

"This would include additional ship construction and weapons procurement that is not currently recommended for inclusion in the Chairman's mark," Wittman said. "This should also include retention of certain legacy assets that would deter conflict in the short- and mid-term."

Wittman called the Biden administration's recently released 30-year shipbuilding plan - which dropped a previous emphasis on a 355-ship goal - as "inadequate" and its eight-ship request for FY22 "anemic." It proposed a plan for building eight ships in FY22, where the Trump administration proposed 12.

"I continue to be perplexed as to our nation's approach to deterring maritime conflict," Wittman said.

<https://www.defensenews.com/congress/2021/07/28/seapower-panel-backs-block-buy-of-amphibious-ships/>

31. HASC ‘Skeptical’ Of Navy Plans To Mitigate Fighter Shortfall, Transition Into Future Jet

(DEFENSE NEWS 28 JUL 21) ... Megan Eckstein

WASHINGTON — The House Armed Services Committee has reservations about the Navy’s plans to transition from the F/A-18E/F Super Hornet into the Next Generation Air Dominance, or NGAD, future fighter jet, though it’s unclear if the committee will take action to force a change in plans.

The Navy envisions fielding air wings with a mix of fourth-generation Super Hornets and fifth-generation F-35C Joint Strike Fighters from now — with the soon-to-deploy Carl Vinson Carrier Strike Group bringing the F-35C on its first deployment — into the 2030s. Once the Super Hornets begin to retire, the NGAD will replace them.

A program office has been stood up to lead the replacement effort, but little information has been released about what kind of plane the Navy wants and how much progress it has made in designing the jet or developing components.

To tide the Navy over until NGAD hits the fleet, the service also wants to modernize and extend the life of some of its Super Hornets through a service life modification program, which takes place at Boeing’s fighter production line in St. Louis, Missouri.

The Navy is confident enough in this plan that it asked in fiscal 2022 budget request to stop Super Hornet production, believing that it can extend its current fleet long enough and field NGAD quick enough that the service won’t suffer a significant fighter shortfall during the transition.

HASC isn’t convinced.

“If you look at the current execution of their SLM [service life modification] line, they can’t meet their cost or schedule that they’re planning to: They’re trying to put through Hornets within a year time frame at a cost of about \$7-8 million; right now the time frame is nearly double that, as well as the cost,” a committee aide told reporters in a July 28 briefing ahead of the Tactical Air and Land Forces Subcommittee’s markup on July 29. “So basically the Navy is not executing their SLM program as they’re currently planning for in the future.

“We’re aware that the Navy wants to focus more resources and funding on NGAD. But if you recall eight or 10 years ago, they tried to do the same thing when F-35C was in development. They truncated the Super Hornet line to focus more on F-35C, and they found out, as the F-35C kind of struggled, the Navy had to go back to procuring more Super Hornets.

“We’re cautious about the Navy’s approach to truncate a hot production line while they focus on a new development program. And given the technology they’re trying to integrate into NGAD, it’s probably not going to be any easier than what F-35C was. So just taking lessons learned from the past, we’re just keeping an eye on how the Navy is going to move forward with trying to manage and mitigate their strike fighter shortfall.”

Navy leaders said in a 2020 hearing with the subcommittee that they needed to stop Super Hornet production so Boeing could use the production line for the modification program, which converts older Super Hornets to a more capable Block III variant and adds thousands of flight hours to the jets’ expected service life. Prior to this decision to end the production line, which was formally announced in the Navy’s FY21 funding request, the Navy planned to buy 36 more jets in FY22 through FY24.

The service has also argued it needs to stop Super Hornet production to reroute funding to NGAD.

The committee aide said in the briefing that any decisions about forcing the Navy to continue buying Super Hornets to ward off a significant shortfall next decade would be made in the full committee section of the bill and the

funding tables, which are to be released later this summer ahead of a planned Sept. 1 full committee markup.

The Navy previously said it faced a shortfall of 49 jets that would be resolved by 2030, and that that shortfall wouldn't hinder carrier strike group operations. More recently, the Navy told HASC that the shortfall would be resolved by 2025, despite cutting 36 Super Hornets from future budget plans and seeing delays in the Super Hornet modification program.

"We are kind of scratching our heads on how the Navy moved up their analysis in terms of eliminating the shortfall by about five years. One, they didn't reinstate the 36 aircraft, Super Hornets, they were going to procure in '22, '23, '24. They also took out about 104 aircraft out of their service life modification program. Also, their NGAD program, the Next [Generation] Air Dominance, is pretty much on the same timeline that it was last year," the aide said.

The Pentagon has not released information on future years spending plans; budget requests often include a five-year Future Years Defense Plan, but in this first request by the Biden administration, the Pentagon only released FY22 spending plans.

The aide noted that "with us not being able to see their FYDP numbers, we're kind of skeptical to understand how the Navy manipulated the data and their analysis to bring the shortfall to resolve five years earlier in 2025."

<https://www.defensenews.com/naval/2021/07/28/hasc-skeptical-of-navy-plans-to-mitigate-fighter-shortfall-transition-into-next-generation-jet/>

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32. Plans For Military Pay Raise, Extra Allowance For Low-Income Troops Move Ahead

(MILITARY TIMES 28 JUL 21) ... Leo Shane III

A key House panel backed both a 2.7 percent pay raise for troops next year and the creation of a new basic needs allowance for low-income service members, signaling significant financial help in 2022 for some service members facing financial woes.

Members of the House Armed Services Committee's panel on personnel issues on Tuesday advanced their draft of the annual defense authorization bill, which included both the annual pay raise and the new needs allowance program.

Although both measures still face long legislative roads before becoming law, the panel vote was significant because it signaled widespread support for both ideas among lawmakers, an indication that the proposals are likely to move through congressional negotiations later this fall with little or no opposition.

"We have successfully assembled a series of provisions that prove our commitment to our military and to their well-being," said Rep. Jackie Speier, D-Calif. and chairwoman of the personnel panel, just before the draft passage on Tuesday.

The 2.7 percent pay raise has already received public backing from the White House. It represents a smaller boost that troops saw at the start of this year (a 3 percent raise went into effect in January) but matches the federal formula for the expected rise in private-sector salaries next year.

Senate Armed Services Committee members included the same raise in their draft of the annual authorization bill,

and House appropriators have already approved language to codify the 2.7 percent mark.

For junior enlisted troops, a 2.7 percent raise in 2022 would amount to roughly \$790 more a year in pay over 2021 levels. Advocates have noted that's a critical financial boost for younger troops, whose base salaries (excluding housing allowances and other stipends) are typically less than \$30,000 a year.

The new basic needs allowance could prove even more important for financially strapped military families.

The idea has been debated on Capitol Hill in recent years, but not included in the final authorization bills. White House officials did not include the stipend in their defense bill plan.

The proposal would create a monthly allowance for military families who, as a household, have an income at or below 130 percent of the federal poverty rate. An E-3 with a family of four and a single military income for their household would qualify for the allowance.

Payouts could total a few thousand dollars, depending on an individual's specific situation.

In the past, qualifying families may have been eligible for food stamps or other state low-income assistance. But changes in recent years to the formulas for that benefit have counted other military payouts, creating complications in applying.

Advocates have argued that makes the creation of the basic needs allowance all the more important, ensuring that low-paid troops aren't left vulnerable to financial ruin.

The next legislative hurdle for the basic needs allowance will come in September, when the full House Armed Services Committee debates the authorization bill. The entire \$700-billion plus policy measure is not expected to be finalized until late this fall.

<https://www.militarytimes.com/pay-benefits/mil-money/2021/07/28/plans-for-military-pay-raise-extra-allowance-for-low-income-troops-move-ahead/>

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33. House Panel Wants Probe Of F-35 Breathing Issues

(THE HILL 28 JUL 21) ... Rebecca Kheel

A House Armed Services Committee subpanel wants the Pentagon to examine breathing issues faced by F-35 fighter jet pilots.

In its portion of the annual defense policy bill, the tactical air and land forces subcommittee is asking the Defense Department to review the F-35's breathing system after a NASA study released earlier this year "had some pretty concerning findings" on the issue, committee aides told reporters on a background call Wednesday.

The NASA study focused on why F-15 and F-18 pilots were having physiological episodes related to breathing issues.

But researchers also had the opportunity to "review and analyze a limited amount of F-35 pilot breathing data," NASA wrote in a post about the study.

Researchers found that the F-35's breathing system delivered "an unpredictable amount of flow at the beginning,

middle and end of each breath and that it changed from breath-to-breath.”

“Such rapid changes in the breath-to-breath supply forces the pilot to continually compensate by adjusting breathing rate, volume, and exhalation/inhalation force,” the study said.

House Armed Services Committee staffers reached out to the Pentagon’s F-35 office to get their perspective on the study, an aide told reporters Wednesday. “They kind of discounted it” because it was based on limited data and wasn’t “formally sanctioned” by the department, the aide said.

As such, the subcommittee’s portion of the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) would require the Pentagon, in consultation with NASA, to “investigate, assess and implement corrective actions for the F-35 breathing system initially noted by the National Aeronautics and Space Administration’s Engineering and Safety Center Technical Assessment Report on the F-35 pilot breathing system,” a summary of the bill said.

“Unfortunately it’s taken Congress to get the department to look at those issues and take action,” the aide said, citing past congressional action on physiological episodes related to F-22, F-18, T-45 and T-6 aircraft.

There have been 40 physiological episodes associated with the F-35, the aide said.

“We want to make sure that instead of the pilot having to adapt to the jet, the jet needs to make sure that it complies with the military specifications required for pilot breathing systems,” the aide said. “The pilot shouldn’t have to think about breathing in the airplane. It should just come naturally so that they can focus on the tactical employment.”

Known as the Pentagon’s most expensive weapons system ever, the F-35 program is expected to cost \$1.7 trillion over its lifetime.

Some lawmakers, most notably House Armed Services Committee Chairman Adam Smith (D-Wash.), have recently raised the prospect of making cuts to the program as they question its sustainment costs.

For example, when talking about the F-35 earlier this year, Smith said he wants to “stop throwing money down that particular rathole.”

In that context, the House Appropriations Committee’s Pentagon spending for fiscal 2022 for the first time in years did not add any F-35s beyond what the Biden administration requested in its budget.

Asked Wednesday if the tactical air and land forces subcommittee’s portion of the NDAA weighs in on how many F-35s to buy, aides said that is an issue for the full committee since it is related to funding.

The subcommittee is scheduled to consider its portion of the bill Thursday afternoon.

<https://thehill.com/policy/defense/565227-house-panel-wants-probe-of-f-35-breathing-issues?rl=1>

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ALLIES & PARTNERS:

34. U.S. Bolsters Ties To India Amid Challenges In Asia

India will receive \$25 million in coronavirus assistance as the two countries pledge cooperation in Asia

(WASHINGTON POST 28 JUL 21) ... Gerry Shih

NEW DELHI — The United States will give India \$25 million to vaccinate against the coronavirus, Secretary of State Antony Blinken announced Wednesday as part of the Biden administration's effort to strengthen ties with a diplomatic partner wedged between two of the United States' largest geopolitical challenges, Afghanistan and China.

Hailing Washington's relationship with India as one of the "most consequential" in the world, Blinken described the two countries as largely in lockstep on the need to find a peaceful solution to the Afghan conflict — as well as to flesh out the Quad, a nascent grouping of four countries that is seen as a U.S.-led effort to counter China's influence in Asia.

Speaking to reporters during a two-day stop in New Delhi, Blinken and his Indian counterpart, Subrahmanyam Jaishankar, did not explicitly name their common rival. But China loomed large as they reiterated a commitment to expand the Quad partnership, which also includes Australia and Japan, to cover broader, nonmilitary issues such as infrastructure development, coronavirus vaccine distribution and climate change.

The White House has placed Asia at the forefront of its foreign policy, with India as an increasingly vital player. Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin visited India in March during his first overseas trip under the Biden administration, and this week he was in Southeast Asia, where he warned Beijing that Washington "will not flinch" if its interests are threatened.

In India, which has been locked with China in a year-long, potentially explosive border standoff high in the Himalayas, the Biden administration has found an enthusiastic partner on some of its initiatives aimed at curbing Beijing.

"Both the range and intensity of U.S.-India cooperation are unprecedented," said C. Raja Mohan, director of the Institute of South Asian Studies at the National University of Singapore. "At a time when India's own relationship with China is one of the worst ever, that's opened up space for a huge amount of cooperation."

Yet India has been more lukewarm about the U.S. departure from Afghanistan. The Indian government has worried about the possibility of a full military takeover by the Taliban, which it views as a proxy force controlled by its archnemesis, Pakistan. It has also warned about the prospect of extremists flowing back into Afghanistan, where they could launch attacks against India. The Taliban has made swift gains in recent weeks and controls about half of Afghanistan's districts.

"It is natural, inevitable, that if the United States, which for the last 20 years had a robust military presence, [withdraws], then there will be consequences," Jaishankar told reporters Wednesday. "What's done is done. But we do not think the outcome should be determined by force on the battleground."

Indian officials say sustained U.S. airstrikes over the next four months — beyond the Aug. 31 deadline for a full withdrawal set by President Biden — could prevent the scenario they fear of the Taliban overrunning the country. But Indian officials have also recently said they have spoken with Taliban representatives, in a departure from India's traditional wariness about the group and an acknowledgment that it could play a major role in Afghanistan's governance.

Blinken on Wednesday said New Delhi and Washington agree on the necessity of a political resolution in Afghanistan and offered an assurance that the United States will remain "very much engaged in Afghanistan," including on the security front.

Earlier Wednesday, Blinken visited with civil society leaders in New Delhi, including a Tibetan leader closely associated with the Dalai Lama, the Buddhist spiritual leader who is denounced by China as a separatist and lives in exile in India.

Before Blinken's visit, State Department officials said he would bring up human rights under Prime Minister

Narendra Modi's Hindu nationalist government, which has been criticized for pressuring independent news outlets and nonprofit organizations and introducing measures viewed as discriminatory toward India's Muslim population.

Michael Kugelman, deputy director of the Asia program at the Wilson Center in Washington, said the United States has long treated democracy and rights issues in India "with kid gloves."

"The visit was mainly about China, Afghanistan, the pandemic, the Quad," he said. "But for Blinken to kick off his visit with a group of civil society leaders — that's nothing to sneeze at."

With the cameras rolling Wednesday, however, Blinken was mild in his criticism.

"We view Indian democracy as a force for good in defense of a free and open Indo-Pacific," he said as Jaishankar smiled beside him. "We also recognize that every democracy, starting with our own, is a work in progress."

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2021/07/28/blinken-pulls-india-closer-amid-challenges-china-afghanistan/>

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CAPABILITIES (ACQUISITION AND INNOVATION):

35. Japanese Firms Sign \$225 Million Deals To Maintain Ospreys For Navy, Marine Corps

(STARS AND STRIPES 28 JUL 21) ... Alex Wilson

The U.S. military has signed two Japanese firms to maintain its V-22 Osprey tiltrotor aircraft across the Pacific under contracts worth \$225 million each.

Under the contracts, NIPPI Corp. and Subaru Corp. will compete for individual, depot-level maintenance orders to "provide the best value to the U.S. Government," according to a news release Tuesday from Fleet Logistics Center Yokosuka. Depot maintenance involves major repairs, overhauls or complete rebuilding of aircraft systems.

The Yokosuka logistics center partnered with Fleet Readiness Center Western Pacific to let the contracts. The Yokosuka logistics center provides service and support for all U.S. military services in the 7th Fleet's area of operations. Fleet Readiness provides support for naval aviation units on ships and on land in the Western Pacific and sometimes the Middle East.

The five-year contracts allow four one-year extensions and one six-month extension if terms are met. With all extensions the contracts expire Dec. 31, 2030.

Both firms have proven records with the U.S. military or with Osprey maintenance, Navy Capt. Edward Pidgeon, commander of Fleet Logistics Center Yokosuka, said in the release.

NIPPI has worked alongside the U.S. government since the early 1950s, and in June 2019 contracted with Fleet Readiness Center Western Pacific, based at Naval Air Facility Atsugi, to increase its capacity to maintain F/A-18 Super Hornets fighters, and H-1 Venom/Viper and MH-60R Seahawk helicopters across the region. That contract is worth at least \$52 million to NIPPI over a potential seven years.

NIPPI has worked on more than 14,000 aircraft for the U.S. Navy and Marine Corps, according to the release.

Subaru will use its Kisarazu facility to repair the U.S. aircraft, Andrew Grage, spokesman for the fleet readiness center, told Stars and Stripes by email Tuesday.

NIPPI has several facilities in western Japan, including one in Yamato just outside of NAF Atsugi in Kanagawa prefecture.

"Securing two proven aircraft firms like NIPPI and Subaru will be vital to the continuity of V-22 maintenance support in [the Indo-Pacific Command] for years to come," Capt. Edward Pidgeon, commander of Fleet Logistics Center Yokosuka, in the release.

<https://www.stripes.com/branches/navy/2021-07-28/osprey-tiltrotor-repairs-us-military-japan-2334831.html>

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COMMENTARY:

36. We're Closing In At Last On Fixing How Military Handles Sexual Assault

(USA TODAY 28 JUL 21) ... Sen. Kirsten Gillibrand (D-NY) and Rep. Jackie Speier (D-CA)

When someone enlists in the military, they understand that serving their country means putting their life on the line. As one soldier once shared with us, she was prepared and trained to fight the enemy outside the wire but never thought the enemy would be a fellow soldier. Unfortunately, that's all too often the case – as it was for Army Specialist Vanessa Guillen, who was sexually harassed by a supervisor before being brutally murdered by a fellow soldier on base at Fort Hood.

Currently, serious crimes like murder, kidnapping and sexual assault are processed by a military justice system that asks commanders, who are not trained lawyers, to decide whether complex cases go to trial, even when they know both the victim and the accused. That system is failing our service members.

It failed Specialist Guillen. It failed Air Force Airman First Class Natasha Aposhian, who was killed by another airman the day after she broke up with him. Just before she was murdered, she told her mother that she was afraid he was going to harm her. And it failed Army Private First Class Asia Graham, who was raped by another soldier in 2019. Her assailant went on to sexually and physically assault two other women before he faced any charges. Tragically, Pfc. Graham passed away before her rapist was convicted.

We have been fighting in the Senate and House for the better part of a decade to create a military justice system worthy of the sacrifice our service members make. But now we're finally on the brink of real change.

We've had enough studies and debate

The current military justice system has proven incapable of handling serious crimes or addressing the epidemic of sexual assault among the ranks. Last year, 20,500 service members were sexually assaulted, and only about a third of victims reported it. That's likely because they know accountability is vanishingly rare. Of all sexual assaults against service members, only 1% conclude with a conviction at a military trial, known as a court-martial.

Since we started pressing for changes, we have heard increasingly unpersuasive arguments that we must first try a more modest reform, conduct another study or create another panel. Congress has now given the military more than \$1 billion over a decade, enacted hundreds of legislative provisions, and chartered special panels, commissions and advisory committees to address the scourge of sexual assault in the military, and none of it has moved the needle.

Last week, our fight took a major step forward. Our bipartisan, commonsense bill to professionalize the military justice system, the Vanessa Guillen Military Justice Improvement and Increasing Prevention Act, was included in the Senate's National Defense Authorization Act. Under our bill, commanders would continue to decide whether to prosecute misdemeanors and uniquely military crimes like desertion. But decisions about whether to prosecute serious crimes like sexual assault, aggravated assault and murder would be moved to independent, trained and professional military prosecutors.

This will give sexual assault survivors a system they can trust and provide real consequences for assailants. And it will give all of our service members confidence that if they are going to be charged with complex crimes that can result in serious sentences, the case will be handled by an experienced, unbiased military lawyer.

After years of obstruction, we are glad to see that the Secretary of Defense has agreed with the recommendations of the Independent Review Commission, which found removing sexual assault and domestic violence prosecutions from the chain of command and professionalizing military justice would benefit survivors without diminishing good order and discipline. We are also glad that President Joe Biden has endorsed this change. This is a historic sign of progress.

No separate system for sexual assault

However, we must go further. Survivors of sexual assault have asked us to take all non-military felonies out of the chain of command. They have told us time and time again that they do not want to be pushed into a separate judicial system that could be seen as stigmatizing to survivors of sexual assault.

Specialist Guillen's case proves why dividing the system in two does not address the fundamental flaw in the military justice system. She was sexually harassed by one soldier and then murdered by another. Without the broader changes we seek, her murderer's case would still be left in the hands of the same command that so deeply mishandled her case that her murderer was able to flee the base and end his own life. Her family will never have justice. We must work to ensure no other family faces the same fate.

The Vanessa Guillen Military Justice Improvement and Increasing Prevention Act would provide the consequences and impartiality that our service members need and deserve. It is supported by experts, by service members, and by a growing coalition of members of Congress from both parties – including 66 senators and more than 200 members of the House – who understand that it is past time for Congress to act and that, more importantly, it's the right thing to do.

We must resist the urge to create a separate but unequal system of justice within the military and must guarantee a professional, unbiased system for all service members. That's why it's critical that our legislation was included in the Senate's version of the NDAA. And that's why it's critical that it also be included in the House version, and signed into law.

<https://www.usatoday.com/story/opinion/2021/07/28/serious-crimes-like-sexual-assault-shouldnt-handled-commanders/8024972002/>

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37. What if There Wasn't a Coup Plot, General Milley?

(NEW YORK TIMES 28 JUL 21) ... Christopher Caldwell

This month, the first crop of books about the end of Donald Trump's administration has prompted speculation: Was the president plotting to remain in power through some kind of coup?

The question has arisen because the Washington Post reporters Carol Leonnig and Philip Rucker report in their book “I Alone Can Fix It” that Gen. Mark Milley, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, saw the president’s postelection maneuverings in that light.

General Milley had no direct evidence of a coup plot. But in the days after Mr. Trump’s electoral defeat, as the president filled top military and intelligence posts with people the general considered loyal mediocrities, General Milley got nervous. “They may try,” but they would not succeed with any kind of plot, he told his aides, according to the book. “You can’t do this without the military,” he went on. “You can’t do this without the C.I.A. and the F.B.I. We’re the guys with the guns.”

While some might greet such comments with relief, General Milley’s musings should give us pause. Americans have not usually looked to the military for help in regulating their civilian politics. And there is something grandiose about General Milley’s conception of his place in government. He told aides that a “retired military buddy” had called him on election night to say, “You represent the stability of this republic.” If there was not a coup underway, then General Milley’s comments may be cause more for worry than for relief.

Were we really that close to a coup? The most dramatic and disruptive episode of Mr. Trump’s resistance to the election was Jan. 6, and that day’s events are ambiguous.

On the one hand, it is hard to think of a more serious assault on democracy than a violent entry into a nation’s capitol to reverse the election of its chief executive. Five people died. Chanting protesters urged the hanging of Vice President Mike Pence, who had refused Mr. Trump’s call that he reject certain electoral votes cast for Joe Biden.

On the other hand, Jan. 6 was something familiar: a political protest that got out of control. Contesting the fairness of an election, rightly or wrongly, is not absurd grounds for a public assembly. For a newly defeated president to call an election a “steal” is certainly irresponsible. But for a group of citizens to use the term was merely hyperbolic, perhaps no more so than calling suboptimal employment and health laws a “war on women.” Nor did the eventual violence necessarily discredit the demonstrators’ cause, any more than the July 2016 killing of five police officers at a rally in Dallas against police violence, for instance, invalidated the concerns of those marchers.

The stability of the republic never truly seemed at risk. As Michael Wolff writes of Mr. Trump in his new book, “Landslide: The Final Days of the Trump Presidency,” “Beyond his immediate desires and pronouncements, there was no ability — or structure, or chain of command, or procedures, or expertise, or actual person to call — to make anything happen.” Mr. Trump ended his presidency as unfamiliar with its powers as with its responsibilities. That is, in a way, reassuring.

The problem is that Mr. Trump’s unfocused theory of a stolen election had a distilling effect, concentrating radical tendencies — first in his staff members and later in his followers nationwide. Rational voices exited his inner circle. After Attorney General William Barr told reporters that he knew of no evidence of widespread voter fraud, he was out. Rudolph Giuliani was in, along with a shifting cast of less stable freelancers, including the lawyer Sidney Powell, with her theories of vote-switching ballot machines and Venezuelan stratagems. Now the president was not only thinking poorly; he was also doing so with poorer information. That was the first distillation.

The effect of the president’s theory on disappointed voters was more complicated. Republicans had — and still have — legitimate grievances about how the last election was run. Pandemic conditions produced an electoral system more favorable to Democrats. Without the Covid-era advantage of expanded mail-in voting, Democrats might well have lost more elections at every level, including the presidential. Mr. Wolff writes that, as Republicans saw it, Democrats “were saved by this lucky emphasis; that was all they were saved by.”

Nor was it just luck; it was an advantage that, in certain places, Democrats manipulated the system to obtain. The majority-Democratic Supreme Court of Pennsylvania ruled in favor of a Democratic Party lawsuit to extend the date for accepting mail-in ballots beyond Election Day.

Whether the country ought now to return to pre-Covid voting rules is a legitimate matter for debate. But Mr. Trump’s conspiracy thinking produced another “distillation,” this time among supporters of the perfectly rational proposition that election laws had been improperly altered to favor Democrats. (To say that the proposition is

rational is not to say that it is incontestably correct.) Those who held this idea in a temperate way appear to have steadily disaffiliated from Mr. Trump. By Jan. 6, the grounds for skepticism about the election were unchanged. But they were being advanced by an infuriated and highly unrepresentative hard core.

The result was not a coup. It was, instead, mayhem on behalf of what had started as a legitimate political position. Such mixtures of the defensible and indefensible occur in democracies more often than we care to admit. The question is whom we trust to untangle such ambiguities when they arise.

For all Mr. Trump's admiration of military officers, they wound up especially disinclined to accommodate his disorderly governing style. General Milley was not alone. One thinks back to such retired generals as the national security adviser H.R. McMaster and the defense secretary James Mattis, both of whom broke with Mr. Trump earlier in his term.

We might be grateful for that. But our gratitude should not extend to giving military leaders any kind of role in judging civilian ones.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2021/07/28/opinion/jan-6-coup-general-milley.html>

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38. Fully Fund The Guam Defense System

(WAR ON THE ROCKS 29 JUL 21) ... Bradley Bowman and Mark Montgomery

The Biden administration talks tough when it comes to competing with China and taking the necessary steps to reinforce America's defense posture in the Indo-Pacific. However, it is not clear whether the administration is prepared to match resources with words. Following an anemic defense budget proposal, the Biden Pentagon is now ignoring — or, at least, slow-rolling — analysis that makes clear that the Guam Defense System represents an essential and urgent priority for American forces in the region.

House appropriators cut funding this month for efforts designed to protect American citizens and U.S. military bases in Guam from an increasingly formidable Chinese missile threat. The appropriators say they support improved missile defenses for Guam, but they cited the Pentagon's failure to submit a required report that was due on May 1 as part of the justification for the cut. That is a short-sighted rationale given the rapidly growing missile threat from the People's Liberation Army and the Pentagon's persistent lack of responsiveness to Indo-Pacific Command's repeated requests for funding to better defend Guam. The decision to cut funding also runs counter to the congressional authorizers' commitment to improving defenses in the Pacific.

If these cuts are retained in the final legislation, they will delay the delivery of vital capabilities desperately needed to address both current Chinese ballistic and cruise missile threats and hypersonic capabilities Beijing is expected to deploy by 2026. That would leave Guam vulnerable longer than necessary and invite aggression from Beijing.

Congress should provide full funding for the Guam Defense System, consistent with the Pacific Deterrence Initiative. At a minimum, Congress should authorize and fund preparatory measures necessary for any new missile defenses in Guam, whether the Guam Defense System or another system. Those measures should include the environmental impact statement and the completion of site surveys on Guam, as well as pushing forward research and development efforts related to the many sensors, weapons and warheads required. This includes the Glide Phase Interceptor, Standard Missile-6 systems, long range precision strike systems, and the Army's Integrated Air and Missile Defense Battle Command System.

China's Missile Threat Against Guam

Indo-Pacific Command calls Guam the “most important operating location in the Western Pacific” — one the United States “must fight from” but “must also fight for.” It is easy to see why. Besides the roughly 170,000 U.S. citizens living there, Guam is home to Anderson Air Force Base, a submarine base, a new Marine Corps base, and numerous logistics and prepositioned stores.

U.S. military forces in Guam are not just a necessary forward-deployed capability. They also represent a powerful symbol that America is a Pacific power and is willing and able to defend its interests in the region. In the event of a conflict in the Taiwan Strait or elsewhere, Beijing knows that the U.S. military will need facilities on Guam to project military power and sustain it once there.

China fields a number of ballistic and cruise missiles that can target Guam. The new commander of Indo-Pacific Command, Adm. John Aquilino, told Congress in March in advance of his nomination hearing that Beijing has sprinted to improve the “range, survivability, accuracy, and lethality” of its missiles. China’s arsenal includes the land-based Dong Feng-26, a road-mobile intermediate-range ballistic missile sometimes called the “Guam killer.” They also possess cruise missiles that could be launched at Guam from any direction using H-6 bombers, submarines, or surface warships. And Beijing is also developing a hypersonic glide vehicle that could target Guam when employed in conjunction with a ballistic missile such as the Dong Feng-17.

Aquilino’s predecessor at Indo-Pacific Command, Adm. Phil Davidson, warned last year that the missile threat to Guam will only get worse by 2026 and “will require us to have a much more robust capability than the combination of [the Terminal High Altitude Area Defense missile defense system], which is deployed there now, and an Aegis ship in response can provide.”

That is why Indo-Pacific Command has made clear in successive annual reports to Congress that the Guam Defense System represents the combatant command’s top unfunded priority. The system would provide a 360-degree persistent and integrated air defense capability for Guam. That would better protect Guam and free up Aegis-equipped warships needed elsewhere.

The Department of Defense has completed (but not delivered to Congress) a study that will inform what the Guam Defense System architecture will actually look like, but it will probably consist of a land-based version of the Aegis Combat System, a solid-state radar, Mark 41 Vertical Launching Systems, and Standard Missiles (SM-2, SM-3, and SM-6). These elements could be integrated — via the Command, Control, Battle Management, and Communications System — with the Patriot Missile Defense System, the existing Terminal High Altitude Area Defense system in Guam, and perhaps the Lower Tier Air and Missile Defense Sensor as well as other potential sensors and shooters distributed throughout Guam and nearby islands.

In other words, the Guam Defense System is a hybrid solution, not a carbon copy of the Aegis Ashore system the U.S. military has deployed in Romania and is building in Poland. Describing this system, therefore, as Aegis Ashore only paints part of the picture and has created some confusion.

In a July 9 op-ed, Adm. (ret.) Harry Harris, himself a former commander of Indo-Pacific Command, reiterated the urgent need for improved missile defenses for Guam. But Harris also expressed concern that an Aegis Ashore system modeled on the ones in Romania and Poland would be inadequate.

Therein lies a major point for Congress to understand. Indo-Pacific Command and the Missile Defense Agency do not seek to copy and paste the Aegis Ashore systems from Europe for Guam. To be sure, there will likely be some similarities, but there would also be many differences in the system built in Guam, based on the island’s geography and the different missile threats the system would seek to address.

To begin with, the Guam Defense System would be a distributed system, making it more survivable. Moreover, Vice Adm. Jon Hill, the director of the Missile Defense Agency, has suggested that key components of the system in Guam could be underground or mobile. “There are ways to do that,” Hill said last month. “It’s not a big stretch.”

Harris also argues that an “essential attribute” of the system in Guam will be an open architecture “to ensure interoperability of current and future radars and interceptors across the services.” He also emphasizes that it should be “persistent, scalable, robust enough to tackle the full spectrum” of missile threats to Guam.

Here's the point: What Harris says Guam needs is what the hybrid Guam Defense System solution will, in fact, provide.

The Aegis system has already integrated many sensors and weapons, and others could be added quickly. As a result, the Guam Defense System hybrid solution would be able to defend against ballistic missile threats and cruise missile threats (with the right sensors). Moreover, an aggressive effort is already underway to ensure Aegis systems can cope with hypersonic threats. The Guam Defense System could also be used to command and control supporting offensive systems, which could be mobile and dispersed throughout Guam and nearby islands. This mix of offensive and defensive systems would make the defense infrastructure in Guam more survivable and a more effective deterrent against China.

Anticipating Counterarguments

Some may respond to this analysis by suggesting that Beijing could simply overwhelm any new missile defenses on Guam.

There are several problems with that argument. At its core, accepting this argument would essentially leave an American territory populated by 170,000 U.S. citizens dangerously and increasingly unprotected. Setting aside the moral and political implications of such a position, failing to address growing missile threats to Guam would turn the island into a hostage China could use to coerce Washington to not respond to Beijing's aggression in the Taiwan Strait or elsewhere.

In such a scenario, Beijing could make clear that any U.S. response in the Taiwan Strait would force the People's Liberation Army to pummel Guam with missiles. Having failed to take sufficient action to defend Guam, American leaders would be forced to take that threat seriously. This is not some outlandish scenario and is actually similar to the first vignette of concern cited by the bipartisan congressionally mandated National Defense Strategy Commission in its 2018 report.

Failing to respond to the growing missile threat to Guam also ignores one of the principal purposes and benefits of missile defense. One of the great benefits of missile defense is that it creates doubt in the minds of potential adversaries as to whether an attack would accomplish its key objectives. By doing so, missile defense increases the chances that an aggressor may not undertake the attack in the first place.

Missile defenses can provide valuable time to launch a more effective and potent counter-offensive. The aggressor's missile barrage may eventually destroy most of its targets, but the protection missile defenses provide, even if only temporally, forces an adversary considering aggression to contemplate the costs a counterattack would inflict. In those ways, missile defenses contribute to what is called deterrence by denial (the aggressor is not confident it can achieve the desired objectives) and deterrence by punishment (the aggressor fears the counterattack might be too costly) — both of which incentivize an adversary to not launch the attack in the first place.

And, to be clear, no one is arguing that the "as built" Guam Defense System will be a missile defense panacea for all time. It would be an important first step that can be implemented in a timely fashion in response to a specific emerging threat. Over time, the Guam Defense System can and should be modernized iteratively with improved hardware and software — both defensive and offensive.

What Congress Should Do

So, what's to be done? Congress should fully support the Guam Defense System requests for this year and not delay action until the next budget cycle.

The combatant command closest to the threat from China has made clear what is urgently needed to defend Guam and deter China, and the Missile Defense Agency submitted its analysis to the Office of the Secretary of Defense weeks ago. Congress should not deprive the military of what it clearly needs just because the Defense Department decided to ignore a statutory requirement and fail to submit a report.

Beijing's missile threat to Guam is growing, and there is no time to waste. Congress should act.

<https://warontherocks.com/2021/07/fully-fund-the-guam-defense-system/>

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